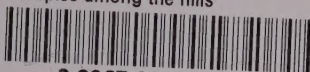


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# Steeple Among the Hills

by

**ARTHUR WENTWORTH HEWITT**

Chairman of Vermont State Board of Education  
and for eighteen years pastor at  
Plainfield and Adamant.



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To  
**HON. REDFIELD PROCTOR, LL.D.,**  
MY PAL OF A THOUSAND PARASANGS OF  
RURAL ROAD, I DEDICATE THIS BOOK,  
HOWEVER UNWORTHY TO DO HONOR TO  
THE NOBLEST OF GOVERNORS AND THE  
KINDEST OF FRIENDS





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**PART I**  
**STEEPLES AMONG THE HILLS**





## “WHY DO YOU STAY IN PLAINFIELD?”

LIKE moonrise on a hilltop when fog is in the valley, the thought rose within me that if ever I published a book on the rural pastorate, I could give it no better preface than to stand in the presence of God and answer honestly a question which has been asked of me a thousand times. On the very next day I opened my mail and read a letter accepting this book for publication. From such coincidence I infer the will of God.

To tell why I have remained, now in the eighteenth year in the rural parish to which I was appointed when I joined the Vermont Conference on trial, is not easy, for the motives are many and conflicting, but I am going to tell you, straight and true.

The worst first. The only motive which is weak in its influence upon me, the only one of which I am ashamed, is that I am too lazy to move. When the tides of energy run low and I wander from room to room of my library and think of packing all those books—no, thank you! Not to mention this would not be honest. To give it more than mention would not be true.

a ministerial jumping-jack fills me with shame. I can leave Plainfield when it is best, but at any sign of frequent moves I should lay aside my ministry for one in which I could maintain my self-respect. I am not judging others. I am telling motives which are vital in me. I cannot understand where is the pride of that man who feels no humiliation at the unconscious insult in those compliments which infer that any particular appointment *could* be an honor to him, rather that *he* to *it*. If any place *can* confer dignity upon him, where is the inherent dignity of his personality? It is worldly, it is vain, but I am telling the truth. I have been a Wentworth for nine centuries, and I am ashamed to stoop to the petty promotions which are in vogue.

Other motives are potent too. I honor and envy those who are priests and nothing else. But I can never so confine my life. By nature and heritage I am a man among men and I value my citizenship. No moving minister has any real citizenship, least of all if he is a city minister. Of course he votes. Of course he has some transient civic influence on his congregation. Occasionally he may make a splurge in some city election. All that is local and ephemeral. But the pastor who has a home and is rooted in the countryside may

become a strong and abiding influence in the government of his State, with all the rich friendships which accompany the privilege. For ten years Vermont has had no senator or representative in Congress, no justice of the supreme court, no judge of the superior courts, no State officer or leader in Legislature with whom I have not been on terms of more or less familiar personal acquaintance. For ten years the State has had no governor who has not either been to my home, or invited me to the executive chamber, to take counsel with him on some matter of state. These friendships have enriched my life and my ministry, and I have loved my citizenship as a Vermonter along with my duty as a pastor. Such things have not depended on my residence in Plainfield, but they have come about because I was a long-time resident in one community which was rural. Nor are these things peculiar to me. They will gravitate toward any man of similar tastes and equal equipment (meager enough, alas!) who will be a citizen long enough for them to gather around him. It would not be honest, I suppose, not to confess that this State-wide contact with men and affairs is one of the factors which would make it seem such a narrowing of life to leave Plainfield for a city pastorate.

For I am intimately familiar with several

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important city pastorates. Such would not want to excuse me from the committee errands which I despise, so trivial in comparison with the prophetic office of a free soul! Such a freedom I might achieve by main strength even there; but why go forth with sweat and blood for that which comes with open arms to my door in greener places? After liberty freely conferred by a kind parish to preach the word and to be shepherd of my flock in my own way; after such acquaintance with each other that I may so order my time as to read and write what I will; after freedom to travel, to be upon the platform, to move among legislators, it would be insufferable to be confined to the errand-boy organization of the machine known as the city church, to be trimmed like a hedge after branching like a tree. There are things which I want to study for years at a stretch; there are things which I am foreordained to write and speak, and I shall not leave my green Bethany of long thoughts. Here in the hills are life and liberty. Not that there is less work than in the city, but that it may be done in ways more direct and elemental, without the clatter of wheels in confusion.

Some of these reasons are selfish, some are frankly worldly, but I am trying to put them



in the reverse order of their importance. The foregoing, forget. Come nearer the cross.

However otherwise the foregoing may sound, my hours are mostly spent as shepherd of souls. I hope to be a minister of Jesus Christ while I live. Pastors are knights of God, serving him in a far country. As no pastorate or bishopric is great enough to exalt them, so neither is any post hard nor obscure enough to degrade them. Our duty is where we can serve best, and I was appointed here. Many of the calls I have rejected might have increased my salary or my reputation, but so long as the work here is beyond my powers none could have increased my service to God. Whatever my little segment of a world might have thought of a move which all its habits would lead it to believe successful, if for any other reason than for the glory of God I had abandoned the patient beginnings of the long years, only to make them over again in some other place, I should know it in my heart for apostasy and failure. When a great business lays in one city the foundations of its development it does not pull up stakes and go to another. When a physician has just built public confidence in a community he does not abandon it for a new venture. Why should I be so much more foolish than they?

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Another motive which keeps me in a humble rural charge is the thought of my brethren. If there is any curse upon the work of God, it is that restless fashion of considering that to succeed is to get out of the rural into the urban pastorate, the unwillingness to serve a country parish longer than is imperative, and the consequent caste and grading of men. *I am betting my whole professional life that this thing is wrong.* Worldly reasons are obvious why no pastor moves from a so-called "leading church" into a great pagan rural community, but is there any spiritual reason why the thing should not be done without loss of caste? Ten thousand of my brother pastors will be in humble rural churches as long as they live; many of them because they are too consecrated to leave, more because no other appointments are open to them. Why should they suffer the heartache and dishonor of professional discrimination because they are rural? No, don't say it! That pious answer has been made until it is stale, but the discrimination is there just the same.

Well, I am not yet man enough to be encouragement to anybody; but if such a day should come, it will find me standing with those men. If I could be the mightiest man in the church, all the more should I stand with the least and

the humblest, helping them to take heart in the great crusade. Not an ounce of self-sacrifice will be in the process, for I believe that the country is the place of greater joy, greater opportunity, and even greater honor, as soon as we have self-reliance enough to laugh in the face of our own profession, or to forget it.

These are some of the motives which have kept me in a country parish. But when I speak in particular of Plainfield and Adamant, the simple reason is that this is home. These people are my people, and I have learned to love them so that if I should leave them I should dream of them by night and miss them by day until the end of the chapter. Their patience, their loyalty, their lovingkindness are beyond all words and have never failed me. I wanted to make this chapter vivid with special instances, but I must not. None of these friends must see the kindnesses of others recorded while their own is omitted; and if I wrote them all, nothing else could find place in the book. I have moved much among men. I know many communities, rural and urban, and I have found no other people among whom I should be so happy to live. I have shared their joys, and I have buried their dead. I have baptized their children; they

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have grown up; I have given them in marriage, and have baptized the children of these in turn, until I can never take root so deeply again in any other affections.

And this parsonage on the curving street high above the Winooski River? The old brick manse is banked with shrubbery which we have set, and there are tall maples along the walk which were planted by our hands. My wife has filled the house with pictures of her making, and I have filled it with books by painful purchase. These might be moved. But God has filled it with memories of things which can never happen to us again in any other house. Here in our youth a few months after marriage we made our home, poor, wholly unknown, and beginning the Conference course of study, which we read together. Here father and mother used to come for long visits—where mother now comes alone. Here baby Hilda came and went. Here are memories of happy friends who will never visit us any more, of glad little folks now grown into jaded maturity. Here my little sister used to come—to-night in the next room two of her four daughters are sleeping and one of them is the image of what she herself used to be. All things end—but when we leave the old brick manse that day will mark the division between



youth and age. It will be a heartbreaking thing to leave to another captain the old ship which carries the whole cargo of our most sacred memories.

Only one thing could then be my solace. It would be to build me a manse above River-ton, high on Sunset Hill overlooking the main peaks of the Green Mountains, and to give the rest of my days to the scattered parish of my own boyhood, more rural and remote than this.

By this time you know that this book will be intimate and personal in method. I do not always like it so. Some parts of this very chapter seem insufferably vain and conceited. There are two ways to write a book on the country church. One is to do it abstractly from a well-organized outline. I commend this method to my city brethren who write on rural themes—I shall never use it. The other method is that of the forthright human document which must be largely autobiographic. The former is the method of systematic theology; the latter of the Scriptures, the truth being the same in both. This theme is too throbbing for me to care to do other than to speak out of experience as I am moved by the Holy Spirit. I cannot stop to organize the message in logical outline. I only give

you these hints. If any references seem inconsistent, remember that the articles have been produced by spontaneous impulse at various times during the last twelve years.

The explanation of the Quiz—Part II of the book—is as follows: In April eighteen years ago Bishop Earl Cranston stood behind the pulpit of the Hedding Methodist Episcopal Church in Barre, Vermont, reading the appointments. It was a cloudy Sunday afternoon. Suddenly a stream of sunlight fell on the Bishop's face as he read, "Plainfield, Arthur W. Hewitt." Plainfield was considered a very humble, hard, typical rural charge, but the years have never belied that promise out of the sky.

Living all my days in the open country, I never knew there was such a thing as "the rural problem" until letters from ocean to ocean told me how helpfully I had written upon it in the Methodist Review. Soon afterward my thoughts upon rural themes were called into still more vigorous circulation. For two years I was asked to give courses of lectures at the Silver Bay Conferences of country workers. Next I addressed the Country Life Conference of the New England and Middle Atlantic States in New York city. Since that November day in 1916 I have

been busy with lectures on rural life and church. Some have been given at great camp meetings, some at “Community-efficiency” conferences held in capital cities at the time of Legislature, and some at Annual Conferences of clergymen; but most have been given in colleges and theological seminaries. Before the first year was over I had lectured in Hartford Theological Seminary, The Berkeley Divinity School, Union Theological Seminary, Drew Theological Seminary, Boston University School of Theology and Pennsylvania State College.

This book is composed mostly of the material of these lectures. Wishing, however, not only to present my own view of the rural pastorate, but to know the questions which trouble the minds of others, I solicited and recorded after each lecture the objections and questions which rise in the thoughts of the theological students of this country when they consider whether to enter the rural pastorate. These questions are not many, but are recurring and insistent. They are not always those which I should have expected. I think I could add some which are more interesting than any which are here, but I am giving the list faithfully as it came to me, adding none, and omitting only two classes, namely: (1) those which might have been personal, such as questions

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concerning the relation of a pastor to legislature and executive state office; and (2) questions on which I have already written at length, such as "What qualifications are necessary to success in the rural pastorate?" which I have answered in "Knights of a Far Country," and "The Picture of Pastor X," two articles found in this book.

Some of the answers which follow are taken in part from stenographic records of the occasion, but mostly they are compiled from answers given on several occasions to the same recurring question.

" 'The time has come,' the Walrus said,  
    'To talk of many things:  
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—  
    Of cabbages—and kings—  
And why the sea is boiling hot—  
    And whether pigs have wings.' "

## “HE LEADETH ME”

THE November twilight was darkening in the ward of the Deaconess Hospital. In one corner was a man whose terrifying symptoms no physician could diagnose. Beside him was one who must go under the knife in the morning. At my left was a man who had tried Eddyism and was still unhealed. Diagonally across from the foot of my bed was a broken old man whose physical pain was shadowed by the hallucination that he was accused of murder. Every man of us was in the deepest gloom. I never had been in a hospital bed before. What malignant thing might be maiming me I knew not yet. The night was dark and I was far from home. Suddenly a piano chord, a hush, then a jubilant full chorus from the place where the corridors cross. The nurses had gathered for evensong, and they sang the favorite hymn of my mother:

“He leadeth me! O blessed thought!  
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!  
Whate’er I do, where’er I be,  
Still ’tis God’s hand that leadeth me.”

On those voices God had come. Conviction came that the song was true, and this chapter,

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written "with eye single to the glory of God," is a testimony that "He leadeth me." As one sits with his dearest friends by the inglenook and speaks unashamed of intimate things, so I now speak to my brothers in the rural pastorate. If anyone sees unbecoming egotism in this personal manner, let him know at once that he is an intruder for whom these confidences were not intended.

But always, in every college and theological seminary where I have lectured, one question has recurred. No one asks it in a public discussion or in class. In confidential nooks of the shady campus or in students' rooms on the top floor of the dormitory it always comes, the only supreme question. Granted the greatness of the crusade and all the fine things we say of the rural ministry, can a man of high hopes devote his life to it and in his heart of hearts be satisfied? "Out of your experience, out of your heart, what is the truth before God? Will you tell us?" Yes, I will.

"I was not ever thus, nor prayed that thou  
Shouldst lead me on."

Before I was seventeen years old I was licensed to preach, and I have been pastor since I was eighteen. In all those years of youth I shared with my mates the conven-



tional notions of ministerial success. All roads, mine as well as theirs, were to lead to Rome. I loved the country, I was bored by the city, but it never once occurred to me that there could be any other success than urban. Some of my classmates, better schooled than I, soon had a choice of city churches while I was still in Plainfield, not so much because anybody wanted me here as because nobody wanted me elsewhere. In my imagination I saw the friends of my youth forgetting me on the shining hills of their success. Nobody in the whole ecclesiastical outfit took the least notice of me. District superintendents and others, well-meaning servants of God to whom he is welcome, had said the most discouraging things about the dullness of my preaching. It wasn't fair, for I had listened to theirs and had kept the secret, but it hurt just the same. I sank to the depths of despair.

When I hit the bottom it jolted my ancestral pride awake. Wrath moved within me. What was the matter, anyway? Just as from the top of Agamenticus I once saw the sunset flash on the glass flower houses of Madbury, so the truth came to me in a flash of light. I, foreordained of God to have a message of my own, was bound like Lazarus by the opinions of lesser men until I could not move a

hand. Why was I unhappy? Not because of my home; this old brick manse in the green paradise of the hills was just such as I desired. Not because of my work; I had a wider field than I could reap. Not because of my people; they were just such as I loved. The only reason for my discontent was that I had blindly believed the notions of others in which I had grown up. I was crushed in spirit by the idiotic opinion of the profession that to stay in a country parish was undesirable. Realization was release. The opinions of folks who could think like that no longer interested me.

Was I dull in my preaching? Yes, God knoweth! But why? Because the prophet was afraid of the milliner. I don't know what real instruction might have done for me. My father, in doubt whether to give me an education or to send me to Harvard, was too poor to do either, and in youth I was too frail. So I never had a day of college, never saw a college Commencement until given my Doctor's degree, and never saw even the outside of a theological seminary until I made a tour of seminaries as lecturer. But I *did* study. With all my heart I sought every hint I could get from homiletic books and every other source. Earnestly I tried to preach

as I was taught. Yet I was a dull failure, on the testimony of those who ought to know.

Once more indignation shook me free. “Never again!” I said to myself. “*Never again, so help me God!* will I think or care how I speak. Forthright, I will say what I want to say in the way I want to say it. If it ends my ministry, praise God for the release! Never again will I care about the authorities. I will myself be authority. The whole ecclesiastical outfit may go.” I felt like a man who wakes refreshed on the top of a mountain.

Then I made a surprising discovery. I had always known that Æsop’s fox could not reach the high grapes, but there were two facts which I learned that Æsop had overlooked. One was that the fox was exactly right in judging the flavor of the fruit he couldn’t reach, and the other was that as soon as the poor animal turned away the clusters began to fall and pelt him on the head until he was tired of it.

The grapes *fell*, of course. The authorities were so slow to cut off clusters that I used to be amused. On the way to Conference in 1913, a district superintendent cautiously said to me, “If you had any thoughts of moving this year, I think possibly I could place you somewhere on my district.” I wanted to

laugh and to say, "I think possibly you could, brother, for I have in my pocket now letters of invitation from the Quarterly Conferences of two of your largest churches." But by that time I had lost all notion of leaving the rural parish.

But I did not know that I was to face one more crisis. God selected for me the most decisive one on earth. Trinity Church in Montpelier may or may not be much of a church—it is so bound up with the memories, the imagination, and the affections of youth that I shall never be able to judge. I was brought up in a little congregation of forty people who never had any preaching but that of students—not theological, but preparatory school students. From their humble ministries I went to Montpelier to school and suddenly found myself in Trinity Church, thrilled and captivated by the rapid eloquence of Charles O. Judkins. State House traditions had filled our home from childhood and Trinity was in our capital city. Senator Dillingham, boyhood friend of my father, was a member of the congregation. Montpelier Seminary was my father's school and my own and that of all my former pastors, and its students attended Trinity Church. At the altars of that church before I was of age, I had been ordained dea-

con by Bishop Fowler on a day when he had delivered there the most tremendous oratory I ever heard, before or since. Every imagination of my youth glorified the place into cathedral-like proportions. And now I was offered the pastorate of Trinity Church! The superintendent of the Montpelier District urged me to accept. I took counsel of my own superintendent; he urged the same. So advised my friends. I had settled to the country pastorate. Other churches would not have tempted me, but this was Trinity, and I could hear that deep-toned bell which had called worshipers to listen to their pastors in honored line, Charles Parkhurst, Timothy Prescott Frost, Andrew Gillies.

For an absent-minded week I kept the answer waiting. At Silver Bay, after my lectures, some letters came from Plainfield—letters from young people asking me not to leave them; letters from old people asking me to stay and comfort them while they lived and to bury them when they died. Then there was a petition signed by every official of the church promising their loyalty and my liberty, and asking me to stay with them indefinitely as their pastor. Then I knew my duty and my heart's desire. I do not know whether I shall stay in Plainfield for a long pastorate

or whether I shall leave at the end of the first twenty years; but I am glad my people did not let me go to Trinity Church. It was the last late battle of a war that had ended, like New Orleans after the Peace Treaty, but it did much for me. It confirmed me in the decisions of years before. It put me at brotherly ease with the now appreciative "powers that be," and it called into momentary power some passing regrets.

For now we approach the reasons which this article has for being written. It is true that I have always loved the country more than the city. It is true that I no longer think it a sacrifice to devote myself to the country pastorate. But once I did not think like this. In the years when I was making that real decision which was given finality by the incident just told, I felt that in giving up all prospect of a city ministry I was giving up three things which were supremely dear to me.

I had all the impulses, if few of the gifts, of the orator, and I had a passion for the listening throngs. These might be in the city church, but how could they be in the rural? This essential part of myself I sacrificed with many pangs on the altars of God.

Then I wanted a library—not the ordinary workshop affair, but such a collection of the



world's literature in bindings worthy of it as I knew the meager salary of a rural pastor could never buy.

One thing more. I wanted travel. The picture of Yosemite was in colors on the wall of my babyhood home. My father told me stories of Colorado. I wanted to see the wonders of our great land, of Europe, of the Holy Land, and I knew that one tour alone would take more than twice over the whole annual salary which I was getting. Never mind. That, too, could go if God wished it. I felt deeply in my heart the duty of the rural ministry and I loved it, but these three dreams had to die, and they died with many pangs. I had yet to learn that a man cannot do God's will and at the same time avoid his own heart's desire. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God . . . all these shall be added unto you." The man who will trust himself to God is inescapably predestined to be blessed far above all his own dreams. Your mercies may not be the same as mine, for he calleth his own sheep by name; but if you are consecrated, then surer than bloodhounds they will follow you down and find you. Be not deceived. God is not mocked.

So I laid on the altar my desire to face the listening throngs. But hardly had I made the decision which sacrificed it when, because I

had retained my citizenship in my rural parish, I was thrust into a position of leadership in the Legislature at the culmination of a generation of educational debate. I have tried to think it would not be immodest to mention by way of illustration what was in all the Vermont editorials and headlines of ten years ago, but I will say only this: From those earliest days of battle and victory, the audiences which I thought I had sacrificed have come surging and insistent. Daily the letters of invitation break upon me like a surf, to recede in a swash of refusal.

Where have I not spoken! Churches, institutes, camp meetings, Conferences, of course. Everybody speaks at these. But in those other memories, what seas of faces! Legislatures with crowded galleries; great city halls and auditoriums; little chapels and class rooms of theological seminaries; college assembly rooms—once a concourse of students so large that I had to take them in relays on two succeeding hours. Speeches at Commencement over the ferns of the rural town hall or the footlights of the great city opera house; speeches at State Teachers' Associations; State fraternal meetings; interstate religious, and sometimes political gatherings; speeches at social gatherings in fine mansions; speeches at banquets without

number, boards of trade, chambers of commerce, State newspaper associations, State dairymen's associations, State bankers' associations, State grain dealers association; great open air meetings; hotels with palatial banquet halls at Narragansett; in Boston; in New York; in the West—oh weariness! I am sick of trying to write a list which I cannot even remember. What I mean by it is only this: I offered up Isaac, and God said “No.” The ram was ready in the bushes. By devoting myself to the country I thought I had given up hope of facing great audiences. I cannot now imagine any metropolitan church the pastorate of which I would not refuse, and one of the first reasons of my refusal would be that to accept would actually diminish the numbers of those to whom I should speak in the course of a year.) Not that in every year I always speak to more than do preachers in such churches, but that I usually do, and that certainly I always should if I accepted the invitations which I receive. Neither do I imply that they do not receive such invitations, but that I am the more free.

The library of which I had dreamed was laid on the altar when I decided to abide a rustic. I never show anyone into my library without a humble remembrance of Hezekiah

showing his treasures to the Babylonians and a fear lest I be like that. But I hope it is not wrong to say for the glory of God that I have been allowed to gather into the ninety shelves of the Old Brick Manse a library which means so much to me that I would not exchange it for any library public or private in the world. This does not necessarily mean that the books would sell for much—though I have had my wild times at Lauriat's and Brentano's. It does mean that my literary needs and desires are met somewhere among these cases which stand covered with colored stones which I have brought from the West, and overhung in one room by my wife's paintings of castle and mountain and sea, and in another by Maxfield Parrish's best, and in another by copies from the masters which I brought home from Rome and Florence.

For the third great sacrifice likewise failed of privation. I gave up the hope of travel. Then by the strangest train of events ever known to romance it happened that, because I had stayed in my rural parish, my dreams came true. This is not the place where I shall tell the story. The results are that castles in Spain are no more visionary to me, for I have walked in the Alhambra. I will not make account of little trips like going to Washington,

delegated by the governor on business of state, or going to Des Moines for a General Conference of the church. Trips of such value are minor and many—to me who lived on cold rye-meal rolls and wore the cast-off clothes of others when I was trying, sick and hungry, to go to school. I have pleasant memories of one springtime trip to the Rocky Mountains; and neither my lady nor I can ever forget that other summer at our ease—Niagara, the Great Lakes by Anchor Line from Buffalo to Duluth, the week in Yellowstone Park, the Rockies, Rainier and the Cascade Mountains with their mighty forests; Shasta, the Yosemite Valley, the Mariposa grove of Sequoias; yes, California from one end to the other, with leisure for its welcome luxuries; then Arizona with the mule-back ride down Bright Angel Trail into the bottom of the Grand Canyon—unforgettable things recalled now only to show that what a man thinks he has sacrificed for the glory of God he may have to take back for the pleasure of God. No, the end of my Odyssey is not yet told, but if a man may quote from himself and I may borrow from the Zion's Herald of October 22, 1924, I will subjoin its history in such rime as will surely doom the chapter to its end.

## HOME AGAIN

Before the sphinx at moonlight  
 A camel did I ride on,  
 And in the burning noonlight  
 I walked in ancient Sidon.

It once was mine to have a  
 Dim glimpse of Ida, later  
 I trod the purple lava  
 Of Old Vesuvius' crater.

I've sailed the Azure Grotto  
 Of Capri, looked on Como;  
 The bell-tower of Giotto  
 I've seen beside the Duomo.

I rivers, near and far, know.  
 To see them thrilled each fiber:  
 The Nile, the Po, the Arno,  
 The Jordan, and the Tiber.

I saw the old Alhambra  
 By moonlight in Granada;  
 I saw, but did not clamber, a  
 White Sierra Nevada.

The Temple of Zeus in Greece is  
 The loveliest ruin, maybe—  
 The old thing fell to pieces  
 Before I was a baby.

The Parthenon and Forum  
 Are fine, but at a glance it  
 Is evident that *horum*  
*Nunc gloria sic transit!*



I cannot tell by half, oh,  
No, no! how happy I am  
To see the Isles of Sappho,  
The Ilion of Priam.

Old Pharaoh keeps his mummy,  
Was proud to show it to me;  
A stiff old snob, as glum he  
Lay pickled, stark and gloomy.

I've been a reckless spender,  
I've ridden donks with labor,  
I've looked on ancient Endor  
From the summit of Mount Tabor.

But lightning bolts may splinter  
Acacias on the mountains,  
The rigors of the winter  
May freeze Madeira's fountains,

Before I find or want a  
Surrounding that's more canty  
Than every last Vermonter  
Sees all around his shanty.

Since all the woods of Plainfield  
Are red and green and golden,  
I'll bide a wee ma ain field,  
Nae friends are like the olden.

## ONE WEEK IN SEPTEMBER

"THERE is a forest fire on Spruce Mountain! How can I call the State forester?"

So said Mrs. Goodridge, wife of the foreman of the lumber camps, as she rushed into Leavitt's drug store in the cool early morning of the ninth of September, 1921. Spruce Mountain is the great, beautiful pyramid that stands on the horizon which is seen from the morningside windows of the Old Brick Manse. It is draped in forests from the roaring brook in the valley to the great rock pulpit of its peak. Pigeon Pond lies at its feet and all around it, up other mountains and across several towns, run unbroken leagues of forest. A fire on Spruce Mountain is a terrible thing.

"Call Montpelier 480—State House," I said; "then call Department of Agriculture and ask for Mr. Hastings!"

Home I ran for rough clothing, ax, hoe, and shovel. I wanted to arrive with the first carload. Four miles up the never-resting spiral of the shady "Brook Road" we raced, then began to pull up the steep lumber road. At last, on foot, we reached the fire in the sag east of the mountain. It had not yet covered

two acres and was in an old lumber slash to which access was easy. Soon came reenforcements, one carload after another, and by the middle of the forenoon all the men and pails in Plainfield were there. Beating it into its own ashes, shoveling it under its own dirt and mosses, trenching around it, we soon had the fire conquered and confined. But to extinguish it was a greater problem. The pulpy carpet of a forest floor will keep a fire dead and buried for a week when with burning sun and turning wind it rises in a resurrection unto hell.

What matter? We had the men, we had the pails, and the mountain brook was a quarter of a mile away. A deep black basin was dug in its channel. We lined up our men in single file, nine feet apart, from the brook to the fire and around it. We dipped the pails full and passed them incessantly from hand to hand. When the thirsty ashes had drunk of their coolness the pails were tossed empty back down the line. New men arriving, our line closed up. To save time we stacked the "empties" and hurled them over two men for the third to catch. I had played toss and catch with a dozen pails then there was a pause. Surely all the empties had gone back down the line. The full pails, fast coming up,

were now pressing hard upon me. I turned to catch one out of the hand of the man below me when there was a yell—too late. I felt a heavy impact on my own pate and fell over on one hand. I was up again and at work in a very nebulous world, when my neighbors were saying:

“Here, take this handkerchief! Drop out of the line! You are bleeding a stream! Take this pail of water!”

These in protest, for I continued until my left eye was blinded with gushing blood and I was dazed and uncertain. (I never again wore that old Panama—the one from which the brown rabbit had chewed the corners as I slept out under the scrub spruces one rainy night on Mount Clinton.) Fifteen minutes by a mossy stump with my head dipping now and then into the pail of cold water—and I took my place in the line once more.

Hastings, the State forester, went past me. “What!” he exclaimed, “the Educational Department? Seems to me you have a good many varieties of work.”

“It is the nutmegs of life!”

W. S. Martin, owner of the forest, went past me. “What! You here?” he exclaimed, pleased and surprised. I was pleased with his pleasure and surprised at his surprise. Did he

think Plainfield had a pastor who could resist going to a forest fire?

But the struggle was ebbing, the embers were drowned. Watchmen were stationed, and the men filed down the mountain, stopped for new doughnuts at the lumber camp, then rolled down the Brook Road homeward.

I had been home half an hour when Mr. Martin called at the Old Brick Manse to inquire for my injuries. He remarked that he had seen the high-school boys in the woods and asked me what reward he could give them—money or a treat?

“Neither,” I told him. Something for the school as a whole would be good, but it was better for them not to have individual profit for joining in a public duty.

“The Victrola!” said Nina, queen of the Manse.

“Surely!” Then I told him how the school was trying to buy a Victrola and still lacked fifteen dollars.

(No, if you care to know the purpose of this article, I am not writing a self-Boswellized autobiography. I am taking just a few pictures out of one week in September—it might as well have been any other week in the year—and by these altogether representative scenes I want to show you the joy and variety of the rural pastorate.)

I rested that afternoon and put up the big reference books on the new shelves in the hall just outside the green study. The hall had been newly papered in a pattern taken from a window in Rheims Cathedral—this to give it dignity, for it was to hold books of reference, late publications of The Methodist Book Concern, diplomas and Wesley's portrait—such things as, being worthy, were not quite worthy of being in the green study with the timeless old classics and Nina's paintings of mountain and castle and sea. A new satisfaction was on me that afternoon, for I had measured in our garden a cabbage whose girdle was forty-seven inches and a sunflower with a stalk lacking only four inches of eleven feet.

Then a black chariot rolled up to the door, driven by Marguerite, the dusky-haired girl who had been our stenographer in the Department of Education at the State House. The lad at her side was Henry, once a little boy in my Sunday-school class. I thought of a day during the week which I spent in Washington by the governor's appointment, when I found Henry homesick in his military camp, got leave for him, took him to the Metropolitan Hotel to dinner, where the big black head-waiter amused us by parading before the mirror; then at evening Henry and I went to hear Billy



Sunday preach—"It is appointed for man once to die, and after that the judgment." Marguerite and Henry selected their marriage certificate and drove away.

To go from pastoral services given to a fair bride to those given to a fat toad is incontrovertibly anticlimactic. Nevertheless, on September 12, after I had mowed the lawn of the Old Brick Manse I found upon it a toad, beautifully bound in mottled brown morocco. He was hopping along with difficulty in the heavy dew. A green grass blade, wet with rain, was stuck on his back. As Nina reached down to disarm him of this vegetable sword he shut both his bright protruding eyes and put his nose down close to the ground between his curving arms, like a school boy dodging a blow. We tried to persuade him to hop back to the garden, but he persistently headed toward the road, where we knew he would be slain by the rolling tire of a rapid Buick—or a Dodge that he wouldn't dodge. So when he reached the edge of that perilous dry Rubicon I picked him up on a shovel with all the dirt he sat on, took him to the garden and deposited him in the cucumber patch, where he sat awhile in meditation.

On the fourteenth day of September I stopped at a little house on a lonely road.

## 44 STEEPLES AMONG THE HILLS

Groves of poplar with fringes of pine grew around it. It had colonial pillars and faced a wide brook with deep crystal pools and roaring cascades down gullies of rock.

Rolling her wheel chair to the open door as I stood on the pillared veranda, Sarah Chase invited me into the house, a poor but neat and cheerful home. I never have seen her large dark eyes without a smile, or her face other than happy and tranquil.

She was soon telling me of kindnesses received. "There is so much good in people!" she said.

"Yes," I quoted,

" 'There is so much good in the worst of us  
And so much bad in the best of us,  
That it hardly becomes any of us  
To speak too ill of the rest of us—'

I can't quote it right."

"I know. I have that verse and I can't say it either. Well, they say there is honor among thieves, and I have often thought if robbers should come here when I was all alone and crippled, would they molest me? I don't believe it!"

I looked out where yellow leaves were dotting the forested peaks, no other house in sight. It was a lonely place. She was paring yellow apples on which the sun was shining.

"But I am really never alone," she continued, smiling. "Jesus is with me; I know it! When I was in the other house where the cupboards were high I would often be working, and something that I must have at once would be out of my reach and I would be troubled; then I would trust in God to help me, and always just then some neighbor would call and put things where I could reach them."

"Are you happy in your afflictions?"

"Yes, I have so many blessings. Though, of course, I should be glad to go—glad to go!"

"How long have you been paralyzed?"

"Thirty-three years last July. And it came so suddenly. It was night and the hired man was gone, so the hired girl and I went out to milk the cows—twenty-three of them. I had milked three and sat down to the fourth when everything seemed to go wrong and I sweat like rain and grew faint and weak. Little Cora was just old enough to run around and was teasing to have her milk and be put to bed. I got up and staggered to the house with help. I managed to put the little girl to bed and give her her milk. Then I lay down on the bed with a terrible pain in my back. Once more in the night I got up by taking hold of things and walked around the room. Those steps were my last. In the morning when they helped

me to rise I sank on the floor. I never walked again.

"I am afraid I acted like a dunce about it at first. I saw the little girls running around, and saw other folks dressing them and I just looked at them and cried. After a long time I asked the doctor why he hadn't told me at the first that I would never walk any more and he said: 'You couldn't stand it. You had just all you could bear.' "

Looking at her, so serene and cheerful, I could not help asking, "Did it take you long to be reconciled?"

"Oh, no, for that was after I was converted, in the old church up in Walden—the brightest spot on earth to me; that was my town—not much of a town either; but—oh, yes, it *was*, for that's where I found God—no! God found *me*—for I was rebellious a long time. I had an experience like Paul who was struck blind. It came in May and never lifted till September—a great black cloud settled just above my head; it was square and black and twice as large as this room and heavy like black broadcloth, so that if it should fall I knew I should hear it strike the floor."

I began to wonder if I heard her correctly. "Could you see this cloud?" I asked.

"No, not with the physical eye, but it was

there. I knew it. I could feel it—and it never lifted until September. That was the year the great fires raged in the forests of Canada and I had to take the washing in because the cinders fell on it.”

Was there any psychological connection between the impressiveness of those Canadian fires and her “cloud of God’s wrath”? The question crossed my mind but did not for an instant distract from the spiritual reality of her experience.

“Right in harvest time,” Mrs. Chase went on, “long-continued special meetings were held, and at first I wouldn’t go. But I had begun to have strange feelings. When Christians went by the house I wanted to run out and talk with them. Then two friends came to see me. ‘Won’t you go to meeting with us?’ they said. ‘No,’ I answered. ‘I can’t get the baby ready and my dishes are not done.’

“‘Get yourself ready,’ they said ‘and we’ll do the dishes and get baby ready’—and I wouldn’t go—I that was brought up to go to church, and they had come just to help me—wasn’t that the *meanest*? But at last I did go one afternoon. There weren’t many there, but all the ministers were there, and when the invitation was given I rose for prayers. And as I came out of the church Mrs. Patterson put

her arms around my neck and said, 'You'll have hard places to cross over; but just remember that Jesus is the best Friend you will ever have, and he will not fail you; and don't you ever go back on Jesus Christ.' Next I had to make open confession of my Lord. And first of all I had to tell the minister how I had felt toward him and his work. It was hard but I did it. And the great black cloud was gone."

With wild asters and goldenrod in my hand, with green checkerberry leaves in my mouth, and new lessons in my heart, I went home through pasture and forest to the Old Brick Manse to write this record. "Without thee all things are frivols," Nina and I had read in a prayer of Thomas à Kempis that very morning, and here was I again taught by humble example to "wake in prayer and in all things meek thyself."

The next morning I made an early departure for the city of Montpelier, ten miles away. Responsibilities of the president of the trustees of Montpelier Seminary and duties of the State Board of Education were the outward sign, but I am afraid the real inward grace of my going was an earnest desire to win back from the framer the pictures Nina had painted for the green walls of my study. In the sunny



southeast room of the seminary I was having a glorious time discussing the Wood Art Gallery with the teacher-training class, when the principal opened the door and injected his head.

"Beg pardon! You are wanted on the 'phone."

It was Nina's voice calling. It was desired that some time that day I should visit Frank Jackson's.

"I will go now."

"They don't expect you until afternoon. I told them you were coming on the train."

"That might be too late. It isn't safe to wait."

For I remembered the dying elderly woman whom I had visited a few days before. Her little Roman Catholic nurse had said to me:

"I'm not Protestant, but they tell me you are the pastor. I want you to come in the room with my patient and say a prayer over her. She may not know you, but that won't make any difference, you know."

I had gone into the darkened room. I had enough of my Catholic sister's faith to believe that prayer would avail even if the patient did not know. But I would rather that she knew. I spoke to the sufferer. She did know me, she talked with me, and I prayed for her. When I rose to go, the tears came to the nurse's eyes.

"Thank you," she said, "you have helped me too—so much."

"We are all brothers and sisters," I said, "whatever our church."

"Yes," she said, "and we are going to the same heaven, and we're all working for the *same Man*, and that is God."

In ten minutes after being called on the telephone I was on the road. In forty minutes, after rolling through Plainfield without stopping, I was in that white farmhouse under the pines, on the hill in Marshfield.

"Oh," said the dying woman in the darkened room, "I didn't think you would come till night. They said you were in Montpelier."

"I was, but I came as soon as I heard you wanted me."

"You had important engagements."

"I can leave them all when I am needed by my people."

"You are a dear, good pastor! Is my little girl here? Are they all here?"

The nurse had given place to me by the patient's head, and herself sat near me where I could consult her in whispers as I needed. On the other side of the bed sat the daughter. Little Irene, the orphan whom they had adopted, was in the nurse's arms. All were

weeping. The patient was passing into paroxysms of agony followed by stupor.

"I wouldn't have given the hypodermic if I had known," said the nurse.

"When did you give it?" asked the daughter.

"It was just a little before *brother* came."

I was touched by this reference to me by my Catholic sister.

"What shall I do?" I asked her. "I can wait here just as long as needed, or I can come again late in the afternoon, but it doesn't seem safe to trust that—it might be too late."

"I'd rather you would wait here if you can."

After a while the patient opened her eyes and moaned out, "Oh,—are you here, Brother Hewitt—hold my hands—let me keep hold of your hands! I am in the dark valley, and I want someone to help me—oh help me!"

"'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me!' Tell me," I said, "what troubles you, what is on your heart, what did you want to tell me?"

Firmly I held the old lady's hands in mine.

"Oh, I have such doubts, and I am afraid."

"Don't you believe in God, in Jesus Christ; doesn't it seem to you that heaven is real?"

"Yes, I do—but oh, I've been so long—and now I'm going to die—and I want to go—"

but oh—I'm not good enough to go to heaven."

"None of us are—in our own goodness. Don't you remember the Bible says, 'Lord, if thou shouldst mark iniquities, who could stand?' But he doesn't. In the mercy of our Saviour he forgives all our sins. 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out—' "

"Yes, I've often thought of that, so often!"

"The thief on the cross wasn't good enough to be saved, but because he cast himself on the Saviour's mercy he went with him to paradise. We are saved only by Jesus Christ. Don't think of your own goodness at all. Can't you trust in Christ alone? Ask him to forgive your sins, give yourself to Jesus Christ alone.

'In my hand no price I bring,  
Simply to thy cross I cling.'

Can't you do this?"

"I love everybody—everybody—I haven't any grudge at all—I just know I forgive everybody," she answered. Irrelevant? Oh, no. I didn't ask its history, the fact of forgiveness was enough, but I remembered that long ago this sufferer and her husband had been members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and long before my pastorate it was written against their names that they had withdrawn, and never again did they come to church.

"Are you sure you forgive everybody?"

"Yes—yes—I know it!"

"Then can't you believe that God for Christ's sake forgives you?"

"Oh, pray for me! Pray for me."

I knelt, and though heavily burdened and unworthy, I pressed my way up to the throne of God as far as I could.

But the dark valley was not yet clear and shining. And again the sufferer quivered like aspen leaves from her nervous reactions. Again came the deadly stupor and the darkness. Again we waited in silence, the nurse at my side with the little orphan in her arms, the daughter weeping.

Consciousness dawned at length.

"Is my little girl here?"

"Yes," said the nurse. "Little Irene is right here."

"She is a darling! Oh, Brother Hewitt! I wish you could have yours!"

(This was a reference to Baby Hilda. She came to the Old Brick Manse one morning in March. She was put to bed in the graveyard under the April grasses on Good Friday.)

"God knows I want her," I answered, "but heaven is dearer as it is. I shall find baby where 'there is no death, neither sorrow nor

crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.' ”

“Yes—and my little Irene is a darling—and *she* is a darling [meaning her daughter] and my dear husband—”

“Call them,” said the daughter.

The husband and the son-in-law came in and took the old lady's hand in turn.

“My dear husband—and my dear Herbert—Oh, they've all been so good to me. I don't want to leave them, I want them always to be with me.”

“They are with you now,” I said, “and they can be with you forever. Listen: These are the words of Jesus I am reading: ‘Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.’ We are going to be with our dear ones forever and ever. We are going to look upon the face of Jesus Christ, world without end.”

A radiance came over the dying face like the sunset light on Mount Shasta, as I saw it long ago from the Sacramento canyon. Again the sufferer sank away for a little. Then I heard her saying,



"Honestly and truly this is the end of the world for me—world without end—world without end!"

Those last words gave me great hope.

"O God! Go with me!" she cried suddenly.

"God is with you," I said. "You cannot see him, but he is here in this room. This is his promise, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' And this is his promise: 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.' and this is his promise too: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.'"

Then, not with fear but with confidence, I heard her saying, "Go with me! Go with me! Go with me!" Over and over again the same prayer with a cadence and a repetition like a whippoorwill calling in the forest beside a mountain lake.

"Let me help you pray," I said. "O God most high, our heavenly Father—"

"God most high, our heavenly Father—"

It has never happened so with me before, but with earnest emphasis she repeated every word of my prayer from beginning to end.

"—be with us in this valley of the shadow.

## 56 STEEPLES AMONG THE HILLS

We have sinned and have been unworthy, but thy mercy is like the wideness of the sea. For Jesus, our dear Redeemer's sake, forgive us all that is past. It is dark, and we cannot find thee alone, but reach down to us our Father's hand, and lead us to our Father's house. We love thee, we trust thee, we cling to thee, thee only—

'All my hope on thee is stayed,  
All my help from thee I bring;  
Cover my defenseless head  
With the shadow of thy wing.'

Save us out of the deeps of death to thy heaven of light. Keep thou our dear ones too. Guard them against the loss of one. Bring them to thy kingdom that fadeth not away, and there, with them, may we look upon thy face in glory, forever and ever. Amen."

"—Forever and ever. Amen!"

We Yankees have a way of saying "Yes" by murmuring with closed lips the syllables "um-hm." The dying woman lay with a new light on her face, ever and anon nodding her head and murmuring these syllables as if answering to some invisible presence.

"O Brother Hewitt! It's all right with me now—I know it," she said soon.

"Do you have any doubts?"

"Oh, no, no! No doubts! No more fears. I know God is with me."

"Are you sure he saves you?"

"Yes—yes."

And at every return after her lapses of consciousness her confidence remained. "She was not ready to die, but now she is prepared, I know!" said the nurse.

"I won't need to keep you any longer—God bless you," said the dying woman. "It is all right with me now. I know. Oh, thank you! God bless you! Come and do for me the last things of earth."

"I will. The peace of God which passeth all understanding abide with you for evermore. Good-by."

"Amen. Good-by."

I went out of the darkened room knowing that Irene Jackson would soon rise from the pain-torn husk of her body to stand in the presence of God.

Going out into the rain I rolled rapidly back in the black chariot to the unfinished business in the city. As I went past the Old Brick Manse I stopped a moment. "There is sorry news," said Nina. "I don't know whether to tell you now."

"Yes. What is it?"

"Raymond Pike is dead."

Raymond! Twenty-seven years old. Skilled graduate agriculturalist. Steward of my church. Tithing faithfully and generous in gifts. Married in the presence of the congregation on Claremont Camp Ground less than a month ago! And now—stricken with paralysis and dead.

Oh, how swiftly (as my old friend Angelo Dougherty said in his sermon) “the four walls fall asunder, and we, sooner than we think, stand in Zion, and before God!”

Glorious with blazing sun and moving moon was the day which ended the week. I used it visiting the shut-in. Two were old soldiers. One of them told me war tales of the Shenandoah Valley. The other lay with blinded eyes and tortured body under the eaves of his ninetieth year, waiting for death, bearing his afflictions with great patience, leaning on the Everlasting Arms. His voice broke as he told me of his little sister who taught him to love God. He was nine years old then. His father was dead, his mother was ill. The little lady of eleven years gathered her flock of brothers and sisters around her and read to them from the Bible in mother’s stead, and made them say their prayers. Dear, motherly child—we spend our years as a tale that is told—to-night her little brother is dying at ninety—and for

nearly eighty years the grasses have been green on her own little grave. Another sister grew to middle age and died saying: "I can see Jesus! I can see Jesus!" And when they asked her, "Where?" she cried, "There! There!" and pointed upward. If divine casements open for dying eyes on things unseen which are eternal, I know not—I only know that one rural pastor has heard truthful people telling him of strange visions.

Under the ocean-blue sky I breathed freely. The day's work was ended. I tore open an envelope out of my mail. What was this? For seven years I had not received an anonymous letter, and now—well, it is not so bad after all:

"The students of the Plainfield Junior High School wish to thank Mr. Hewitt for mentioning to Mr. Martin that they needed fifteen dollars more on their Victrola."

Whence I inferred that the suggestion was fruitful, but it was Nina who made it. Ever and anon credit is accorded to the pastor where wisdom is of the wife.

## THE THIRTEENTH LABOR OF HERCULES

DARK things lie under the shadows of steeples among the hills. The country pastor's task is the thirteenth labor of Hercules. San Francisco sins in the face of the sun; Chicago is called the "scarlet city"; and Cortland Myers walks the platform of Tremont Temple crying, "O wicked Boston!" Surely, we say, the idyllic country is holier, where steeples lift through the amethyst twilight. Not wholly so. Human nature is one. Among green hills and golden harvests are ebony evil things. Did someone think that the rural pastorate is a job for superannuates and greenhorns? Trot him out. Look at him! There is not hide enough in the tannery to make ears for so total an ass. Under the rural steeple is the mightiest work beneath the stars.

You shall measure it, first, by the sins which the shepherd on lonely pastures must face. I read this in a Zion's Herald editorial: "New Jersey reports a case where rural Christianity seems to have disappeared, where wives are exchanged or loaned, and where ignorance and apathy are universal. A Connecticut minister



reports from rural sections which two generations ago were occupied by stalwart Christian men and women. These same sections now furnish terrible tales of illicit relationships, of incest breeding idiocy, of frequent crimes of violence, and cheap whisky everywhere.”<sup>1</sup>

One rural family which I knew could furnish material for a vivid tale by Poe, and its title would be “The Tragic House.” Furious husband and wife literally clawed each other’s faces like angry cats, till divorce took them apart. It was the wife who went away. Three were then left in the family—the old mother, the brother, the sister, all alike in evil temper, living out their angry days unlighted from the heavens. The son cursed his old mother till at last she slunk into her grave out of his sight. Brother and sister were left alone, the last of the circle of love. Often in the gray twilight that sister made the whole mountain-side ring with her screaming. At length the man died, his own hangman. Years later the sister died, a pauper, in the madhouse. In a fantastic dream I saw that poor suicide till-

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<sup>1</sup> The author is not simply telling things he has read. He could fill the pages with harrowing details of moral degeneracy in rural communities, derived from personal observation and careful investigation, not only in his own State but in widely scattered sections of the land.

ing his fields in the April dusk, and I cried out, "Go back! You are dead! What right have you to till the fields? I thought you had committed suicide!" And he replied gloomily, "Oh, yes, I did. But I have repented of that!" In a dream perhaps, but in no reality, will any repentance destroy the effect of a sin that is done. But as I remember that Tragic House (near neighbor to our own) I verily believe that its sins might have been prevented, its awful gloom changed to a bit of glory, by just a few loving visits of God's messengers of peace, by just a little of the pastoral care which it never had at all. I was only a boy; I didn't know much; but I cannot be sure to-day that my own garments came clean from the tragedy.

These are not isolated cases of their kind, and I will not pause to talk about lesser sins of various kinds, though I was once fascinated by the varieties of Sabbath-breaking which I counted between my two preaching appointments within ten miles of our capital city. Here they are: Haymaking with men and teams; gardening; playing baseball (though we are a little in doubt now whether Sunday baseball is to be called a sin or a means of grace); fishing; building houses; running factory machines; selling cattle; trading in groceries, and

butchering hogs. These all are sins of act. But the sins of attitude are what really make the rural work hardest, such as unmovable spiritual laziness, indifference, conservatism, gospel-hardened hearts, etc. I quit this part of the theme not because I am out of the woods, but because the vista is so long.

The second measure of the great task is the sorrow the lone shepherd must comfort.

Through unending monotony and the gloom of uninspired isolation there is a vast amount of dull, hopeless discouragement in the country. This ends in nervous wreckage and insanity, sometimes in suicide. The rural pastor is not only preventing sin, he is saving life and mind. "I don't know what ails me," said an old man, "I don't know what to do, but I'm so lonesome all the time—oh, so lonesome!" A poor mother on a mountain farm met my pastoral visit by bursting into tears and saying, "Oh, somehow I felt just as if you would come to-day, I have so many troubles and problems that I want you to help me about!" Then she told me things which were beyond my wisdom to solve, and how a little more of the dull burden would mean insanity. I was alarmed at the fool I must appear, for I did not know what to say. At length she surprised me by saying, "You

have settled my problem so nicely. You have given me just the help which I needed!" Then I knew it was sympathy, not wisdom, which she needed, for not a problem had I solved.

Sometimes it is vague, undefined sorrow that one meets; sometimes it is bitter indifference or rebellion; or the very life of a worried beast of the field; or the spirit breaking under hopeless poverty; or the heart breaking for children gone away; or the body dying when money and skill would save it. Along Orange Grove Avenue in Pasadena no man builds a house for less than twenty thousand dollars. Down where Bellevue Avenue leads to Cliff Walk and the ocean are the stone mansions of those who have limitless millions. But up among the northern rocks and forests I have conducted many a funeral that a little money might have prevented. I can show you mothers' mounds and baby graves which would not have been but for stark poverty and isolation from the specialist's skill. This is a price which I myself have paid, and I know whereof I speak. Our country doctors are magnificent men, but they are called for every kind of practice, and they cannot be at their best in all.

Having selected the farm of their heart's desire a father and mother begin the long fight

against debt. When at last their home is all paid for, they no longer want it. They have lived there so long that no other place will ever be home, but now they are growing old, aliens have taken the places of their old neighbors, and the city has called away their own children whom they had hoped to lean upon—the city that will never give them back,

“For Lochaber no more, Lochaber no more—  
We’ll maybe return to Lochaber no more.”

Nine years of my boyhood I pulled the scratchy woolens over my naked, shivering little carcass in a room where the frost was a quarter of an inch thick on the bare plaster. Downstairs there were a few rough wooden dining chairs and one uncushioned rocker; no silver on the table, no pictures on the walls, and but one little kitchen fire in all the wintry house. Father and mother owned that house one later day and it was full of comforts. Meantime what had happened? Grandfather and grandmother were in the churchyard. The boys were all married and gone away, all but the youngest, who had planned to stay on the farm, and he has been under the grasses for thirteen years. Death laid his hand on my father’s arteries. Could the place seem like home any more to my lonely mother? Yet

this is the common story of the country home. The long struggle against debt ends in triumph—and loneliness. It is like a man walking a woodland road beside a singing brook. White birches and green ferns are spangled by the golden sunlight, and the man walks on. Sunset falls, and gloaming, and “after that, the dark.” At the end of the road he finds an empty house where the mosses cover the sagging roof and the broken windows glisten to the moon. When at last the home is his very own it is empty. There is no abiding place here. We must look for a better country, that is an heavenly, “Where no evil thing cometh to despoil what is fair.”

Did you ever think who, besides the superannuate, is sent to comfort the peculiar sorrows which haunt the country? It is not the man in his prime, except in some instances of men who never had any prime. It is the greenest and youngest apprentice who goes to the country church. Many, many country pastors are mere boys, vividly imaginative; and in the long walks between rural homes one cannot shake off the thought of what he has seen and heard as he could do on the lively street where call and call are near. On the long, lonely walks the sorrows of the last home rise before a boy's imagination, reach out their



gaunt hands and clutch weirdly hold. Shall I ever forget the eyes of that forty-year-old mother looking up at me when they told her she had three new cancers and had to die? Shall I forget the cries of her babies, "Mamma! Mamma!" all through the funeral service? Can I forget the letters of mothers whose girls have gone wrong? Can I forget the sobs and screams of that woman whose husband was struck dead in the night when the hurricane hurled through his skull a branch of the tree? She would not say a word, she would not let go my hand, she would not look anywhere but at my eyes, dumbly beseeching me to say something and to be quick about it, and God knows I didn't know how! Shall I ever forget my first funeral of a suicide? Two young women had never been away from home, till one summer afternoon (when the elder was twenty-six) they were offered a carriage to drive for a few miles. They didn't know how to drive and they caused another carriage to overturn. Terrified, the poor ignorant girls took carbolic acid. In their naked home of illiterate poverty, while I read the ritual at the coffin of the elder, I could hear the groans of the younger, soon to die. And who was I to bring comfort to that father and mother? Just a boy in my earliest twenties, a beginner

such as over and over again forever are sent to those remote places, if they have any pastor at all. And shall I forget that other suicide, the aged woman? Her children looked out of a black window at night just as the vivid lightning showed them their mother hanging stark to an apple tree. And on the hills of West Glover one sunset hour, shall I ever forget—but that is stark horror—too ghastly, too piteous to tell. Out in the black darkness of starless nights, when one comes home weary on the long walks, these sorrows play dirges on the heart, these horrors play leapfrog with the imagination. Four miles from my Plain-field manse, on a road through the woods, I was passing a ruined house which looked empty, and it was at dusk of evening. Suddenly came the unmistakable call, the strange impression that I ought to visit that house. A feeble old woman met me at the door and showed me the bed where her husband lay, under the unsanitary nursing of the peasantry. Shall I ever forget how, in the awful stench of that room, he gibbered through the hideous grin of his lipless teeth? He pointed his finger to a bottle and there, pickled, were the great cancers that had eaten his face to the bone! In the long walks when one is alone with his thoughts these horrors ride neck and neck

with his imagination like Faust and Mephistopheles, rushing along on black horses at night. And when the pastor is a boy, as so often the country pastor is, it is hard.

Most of the sorrows, of course, are not spectacular ones; they are inconspicuous, dull-aching ones. And from these it is harder to find relief in rural life. Country life is intensely subjective. In the city one can turn to a great variety of external interests. But, "Comfort, comfort ye my people," is a large commission to any rural pastor.

Third measure of the country pastor's task—the numbers of his people and the miles, mountains, woods, plains, and valleys, over which they are scattered.

If anybody thinks the country pastor's work is small because he has few people, it is a bad mistake. It is not for lack of sheep that these pastures are lonely. When Bishop Henderson called for a "constituency roll" in the Vermont Conference the pastor in our capital city reported a thousand people, and the bishop remarked on the size of his parish. Because I think my own an ordinary rural parish I use it for illustration. In a township of about nine hundred people ours is the only working church, and through the village where its steeple rises runs the line of a neighboring

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township, with a third town line at angles with this a mile away. This means that our constituents come from parts of three towns. Two and a half, three, and seven miles away are other churches; but if you subtract all who would naturally attend those churches, and all Catholics, you still have an absolute minimum of twelve hundred people who must have evangelical church privileges with us or not at all.

Our people are proud to see the church well filled every Sunday, membership and congregations at the high-water mark of our history, but the task is yet untouched. Church (floor and gallery) will hardly seat two hundred and fifty. That means that if our largest Sunday-morning congregation were chloroformed or transported to the moon, and if one half of the constituency remaining should come to church only one half of the time, no one person coming on two successive Sundays, we could hardly give them seats. If we were really successful, we should be no fools if we said, "I will pull down my barns and build larger."

The gathering of a congregation in the country is difficult. One has to contend with stay-at-home habits (many people never leave home twice a year for anything); numerous chores on the farm, together with Sunday-morning trips

to the creamery which aggravate the already difficult problem of transportation over many miles; physical overwork during the week; difficulties of a subjective nature—poor folks away back on the farm feeling diffident about “coming to the village where the folks dress better and are stuck up.” Some fear to go lest they suffer theft while gone. It is very hard after chores to dress a family of children and get them many miles to morning service in time. Sunday or none is the day of the farmer’s visiting and of his reading. Then, as in the city, so even here in the villages, one man gets his Sunday headache, another the Sunday Globe; one man has an attack of biliousness and is confined to the house; another has an attack of automobiliousness and is confined to the public highway.

I have given you in number of people the size of a representative rural parish. Think with me a little further. What of pastoral visiting in the country?

If I had these people in a city, I might have the benefit of proximity or of the trolley, where now it is shoe leather and magnificent distance. For, with the speedometer of an automobile, I have found that there are, measured in one direction only, with no part of the road counted a second time, eighty-one miles of highway

along which my people live. With an auto, and making no stops, it is possible to go up one road and down another. But since the people have an absurd prejudice against calls made after midnight, a pastor has to visit part of his road, then return and start anew the next day, with the result that he travels much of his road four times over. The normal amount of travel in making one visitation of my parish is two hundred and fifty miles, the absolute minimum two hundred miles. This refers only to my main parish and does not at all include an out-appointment where the same conditions are repeated on a smaller scale. And if I did not believe this parish to be a representative, average rural parish, I should not thus blatantly mention it. The week's work is not easy.

That some of our villages are overchurched I do not doubt, but I am perfectly convinced that the greater part of the territory of our State is wholly unevangelized ground. The great majority of its people never once come to church, never once are visited by any pastor. Very few people go to church from more than two miles away, and when the pastor from Hemlock Dell visits he goes out only so far as he finds people who come to his church; he does not go until he finds people who go to



Moss Glen Church; neither does he agree with the Moss Glen pastor to define the borders between them. By far the largest part of the rural field falls forsaken between fold and fold. Why are stalwart recruits for the ministry so few? Because the mighty Martin Luthers of the day are out there in that belt of oblivion which circles every country charge as Saturn is encircled by his rings, and will remain unconverted till they die, for no man careth for their souls. A district superintendent driving with a pastor through miles of country homes asked, "Whose people are these?" "Nobody's," was the careless answer. If the church thrives as an institution, pastor and people are selfishly unconcerned about the great outlying country, the people to whom it ought to minister. The church is busy saving itself. Will it never know that nothing would so electrify and vitalize any church as to forget itself in saving others? And so vast is the field that the rank and file of the church will have to take sickles and have a hand in the reaping.

But very often, instead of furnishing healthy reapers, a church is itself suffering from a strange epidemic which may be called the "cussedness" of saints. The man of the world points a finger of scorn at those thus afflicted. It is hard to answer him because you know in



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your heart he is right. If Christianity really made folks like some professed Christians we know, we should shun it as the pest, but, thank God, it isn't Christianity which does it. It is true this disease is by no means confined to the country church, but because of the greater relative importance of the rural individual it is more harmful here. The "cussedness" of saints has acute forms, manifesting itself in ructions and backslidings, but mostly it is a malady tending to be chronic and leaving the patient in obtuse unconsciousness of his affliction. Its symptoms are manifold. Sometimes it manifests itself in cutaneous hyperæsthesia, especially when officers of the society are changed or the other fellow's opinion is chosen. Sometimes the disease manifests itself in a total inability to define. For instance, Bishop Hamilton told us about some stewards who signed petitions for their pastor's return, then personally protested to him against it. Or, to take another instance, a pastor proposed a slight reform in methods. The officer addressed suggested objections which might arise on the part of others—she herself, of course, would favor it. Then in all corners of the church the pastor heard her slyly talking against the reform. At length she brought back word that under the new system she

couldn't find helpers. Now, in both these instances the patients supposed that they were persons of diplomatic policy "for the good of the church," whereas the dictionary would define them as cowards and liars.

Another manifestation of the disease is a tendency to imitate. The patient does not imitate Christ, but, rather, that which he himself worships. So, like a child writing each line worse than the former because copying from his own lines rather than from the teacher's, the patient goes on imitating his own past conduct. This imitative tendency usually takes for its model some animal. Certain patients have evolved striking likenesses to the ass and the hog, or even the peacock. But the strange thing about the malady is that while these imitations have been perfected, the patient all the while supposed he was imitating something else, for example, the lion or the owl; and cases are on record where the patient has ripped out the most stertorous gruntings, all the while supposing that he was cooing like a dove.

The financial manifestation of the "cussedness" of saints should be hinted. Men wonder why it is hard to raise money for the pastor (that is the way they put it, and often make beggary of it by appealing on the ground of

the pastor's personal need), when their infernal parsimony keeps the salary so low that it compels the appointment of that kind of pastor for whom it is always hard to raise money. Having fixed a salary at a minimum, the officials let it slide along unpaid until the end of the year, and if they do not find it convenient to pay it all then, they will sometimes ask the pastor to lie about it for their credit and report it all paid, "because, you know, it is all pledged, and will be paid some time." In one case, close upon the end of the year, with salary unpaid, there was sickness and death in the parsonage. While the pastor was planning how to pay doctor, trained nurse, and undertaker, his financial agent sent word that he could not stop to collect the overdue salary "because his sows were pigging"! To the credit of human nature be it said that before the financial agent got through "pigging," the loyal people, unsolicited, came forward one by one and paid and overpaid the pastor. For the fault is not with the people at large, but with the (lack of) business organization of the little churches. Often those who are in positions of trust and leadership are so narrow as to be the most retarding element in the church. In one church certain official members deplored the extravagance of spending forty dollars for

printing and advertising when they saw with their own eyes that the expenditure brought in automatically and in advance thirty per cent more cash than had been raised in other years when second solicitations had been necessary. One financial agent in all seriousness made this proposition to a board of stewards: "The salary is five hundred dollars, and there is just fifty dollars deficit. The minister practices tithing, so we are coming out just even." (!)

The day is past when I suffer from these things, so I may freely speak of them. A church chooses the expenses of a minister to suit their taste, then it chooses his salary to suit their stinginess, then its members expect him to be gratefully silent, for they think (at least they sometimes *say*) that a minister should be more consecrated than to speak of salary. So we won't speak of it any more, but will pass from the financial to the spiritual "cussedness" of saints.

By this we do not mean sins of act, though I have seen in open Sabbath-school session a red-faced married steward of a certain church putting his arm around a maiden in the class he taught. I want to speak of something not quite so exceptional—that apathy and self-centered indifference, where winsome, working lovingkindness should be. A kind woman of

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middle age and many afflictions gives every year to the benevolences of a country church more than its three wealthiest members; but she cannot be persuaded to join that church because its members have neglected her so long that she feels "it is better to go her way alone."

For the first time in his life a veteran of Gettysburg, threescore and ten years old, gave his heart to Christ, desiring baptism before the congregation, and membership in the church. On the appointed day, sick in bed, he was unable to appear. I visited him faithfully every week through a winter of illness, but at its end the veteran handed back his Probationer's Companion, saying that he would not be baptized, for he "guessed they did not want him." Within three minutes' walk of the church, not a member had visited him through all the winter, though many of them knew both of his illness and of his conversion. I never saw him in the church after that day. How much of a pastor's work is icily desolated by the same people who demand results from his ministry!

When those who long have been members of the church ask me who is to join at the next communion I have been able frequently to say that such and such persons, of their own

accord, were asking baptism and membership, professing conversion. Have I heard a glad, loving approval, saying, "It is good, and I will help them all I can!" or have I seen the least show of Christian welcome? Sometimes, but too often have I heard, "Well, I hope he'll lead a different life!" spoken with a supercilious smile. There is criticism in the presence of the saints of the church over one sinner that repenteth by more than ninety and nine members who need that same repentance. Cold-hearted, superior, critical, they sit afar, guarding the purity of the church by numbering the sins which God has forgiven. But they lament the passing of the old-time revivals; and still their shepherd goes out to the mountains aching with the knowledge that every lamb he brings home will die by their hardness of heart. No, not that—it is only thoughtlessness, but it is dead wrong and ought to stop.

Fain would I also be to have folks patient concerning the much demanded pastoral trot. With more than a thousand people to call upon, I have called for the fourth time in a year upon a family who shut me away in a sitting room while, behind the closed kitchen door, I could hear them discussing why the minister didn't call oftener.

All the foregoing being anent the "cussed-



ness" of saints, I dismiss it with a kick. I like it not, and, as I shall make perfectly clear before I quit, the malady is not general. Blacken it and multiply it by ten and it cannot change the fact that the country is still filled with nature's noblemen. It is not strange that among so many folk of the church there should now and then be one who thought he had the grace of God when it turned out to be biliousness.

The next handicap of the country church is the inefficiency of its ministry. There are shining exceptions to this rule (you parsons who are just now stiffening your necks and getting mad over this passage are doubtless such), but for generations the rural work has suffered generally and fatally from this cause.

Great numbers of our country preachers are uneducated—have never been to college or seminary; many have never even completed a course in a secondary school. Some of them are not to be blamed, for they did their best and couldn't bring it to pass, but innocent as the defect may be, it is still a defect. In most cases, however, it is a handicap of the man's own choosing. He prefers to get at his work early rather than to pay the price of preparation.

But I am not talking about the minister's



schooling. That is the least of our cares when we speak of mental unfitness. That a man should be unschooled we can forgive. Many a splendidly educated man has never been to college. Education is not determined by circumstances; it is foreordained by temperament. Still the fact remains that, entirely apart from the question of their schooling, great droves of country ministers are ignorant, are so temperamentally unmental that they never can be educated. The majority of them, though desiring this very thing, will not for one instant be considered, either by appointing powers or by people, as intellectually fit for the churches in the cities and large villages. By what reason, then, are they any more fit for the church at Pine Mountain? The really brilliant young men are promoted from the rural ministry to supply urban demand. They are never left in the country church longer than enough to prove their prowess. Soon as they begin to transfigure rural life they are called, and they are glad to go. We cannot stop to discuss their reasons, but it is this one fact which breaks the heart: Forever, if a man is found feeble and mentally unfit, he is left to the rural work.

A minister who had preached for years told me that he never had read the Bible through.

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The following, without change of a word, is quoted from a country preacher's sermon on Ruth, after a Scripture lesson about the Saviour:

Ruth she went into the land of Mobe, and married Booze and out of that come the Saviour to which the scripture was read this afternoon, but they was forty-two generations betwixt him and Adam and he come through 'em all.

A little later the same preacher said he "met a man layin' in the gutter." No man can be judged by a single sentence, and the man who on Lyndonville Camp Ground exhorted the "salt of the earth to rise and gird on its armor" might have been influenced by his Hymnal,

"Forward! flock of Jesus,  
Salt of all the earth,  
Till each yearning purpose  
Spring to glorious birth."

A military command addressed to salt which follows a shepherd may (acting upon its yearnings) induce it to make a flying leap into obstetrics. But that is poetic license. In plain prose some degree of unfitness must be suspected in the man who said from a rural pulpit, "When rich men can *git* great fortunes, shall *that great Creature, the Creator*, ask in vain for a cent for missions?" Or in the pastor who, in preaching about the power of Jesus in

healing those who were "sick with divers diseases," said, "Some doctors can cure those that have got the measles and set a broken bone, and they can cure consumption and operate for cancer, but only Jesus could ever cure those that had the divers!" On one occasion I was nearly convulsed by hearing the preacher (who had read "they shall *scour* you in synagogue") make reference to "Beezlebug, the prince of devils."

When a bishop stops all business at the report of the registrar of examinations, calls together the entire class of undergraduates (all rural pastors), and lectures them severely on the duty of attending to their studies it is significant. But I would not have you think by this gossip chat about the stark ignorance of some dunces and the neglected studies of others that more general education would make things wholly right. We want something more fundamental than that. Entirely apart from the degree of their culture we want *great minds* in the country pulpit. During their sermons we want no Alexander Pope writing in his hymn book,

"Gracious God,  
What have I done to merit such a rod,  
That all this shot of dullness now should be,  
From this, thy blunderbuss, discharged on me?"

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The man without catholicity of mind and sympathies will do just what thousands of our rural preachers are doing. He will show an intense but narrow and sharp-cornered zeal for some nonessential which fascinates his peculiar self, but which, when over-preached, is worse than nothing. Or, taking some essential doctrine, he will preach it to the exclusion of everything else, often himself losing the spirit of that very doctrine. Sanctification, as Bishop Fowler said, becomes cranktification. (Once in a country store I sold tobacco for a wholly sanctified man.) The sweet gospel becomes bitter. The friends of one minister told of him with pride that all his preaching was "raking the church members over the coals." This is a fault that may be overdone. I heard a minister defend his unkindly preaching thus: "I wouldn't give a cent for a sermon that doesn't get somebody mad." Well, the man of the world who gets right down carnally mad can give the church an everlasting letting alone; but what about these poor folk who have loved it from their cradle days? Isn't there a kinder way of correcting their faults than to lash their hurt hearts over the altar rail? They may have failed sadly to measure up to the pastor's ideals; they may have crossed him (probably without knowing it); they may

have hurt the cause by their "cussedness"; but does this minister know how hard they have tried, how much more "cussedness" they have conquered than ever they manifest? Some folks have their automobiles and their millions, but these poor people have looked forward all the week to their chief joy—the Sabbath day. They are tired, lonely, disappointed; they have come to church to be encouraged; and it is inexpressibly sad for them to be slapped in the face, for them to be hurt hard in God's own house by the one man who ought to understand and love them. This is not fiction. No man has spent his life in the country church without hearing the barbed arrow's whiz. Personal thrusts in vengeance for wrongs that were not intended are often made from the pulpit. (I am judging from the fact that they have been boasted of afterward.) And there are hurts of other sorts. An ungifted woman told her scholarly pastor that she liked the sermons but could not quite understand them. She was informed that a minister could furnish sermons but couldn't be expected to furnish brains with which to comprehend them. It was very true, but was it very kind?

The rural ministry, with noble exceptions, has another fatal defect. It would be hard to call these men lazy, but they are not masterly.

They fall into the customs, they go through the routine, they do the expected and the easy things. But with no energetic precision of far-seeing wisdom do they plan a statesmanlike program of construction; with no unrelenting will do they execute what plans they have. Instead of driving all the powers of their souls under whip and rein, like fleet horses of a charioteer thundering round the circle of the Coliseum, these men let their energies amble along like old mares in green fodder. They are not imperial with determination such as made iron old Andrew Jackson cry, "By the Eternal I will!" Why does not every country pastor know that he can make himself master of the destinies of man as Napoleon never was? He is neck and neck with naked human nature more than any other man that lives. Specialists in fiction say that (with the possible exception of the newspaper man) the country minister has the unrivaled opportunity of the ages to write great fiction, if the gift be in him, because no other man lives so close to human nature. Certainly his city brother does not. He may know men because of special insight or early opportunity, but the restraints of city society cover up primeval nature—it is hard to get close to it. I am not saying this myself—I am quoting it from men who have spent their

lives in city pastorates. A man may be captured in the country who could not even be besieged in the city. The cities rule the nation, and with eighty per cent of the dominant men of the cities coming down from the provinces, the country ministry, if it only knew it, could make itself supreme over the destinies of the world. Rural hands might clutch the throttle and turn the switches of human life. But what are these men doing? Though the night is coming when no man can work, they go down the days that are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, half idly and all at ease. A man official in a great denomination who visits hundreds of rural parsonages every year told me this: "More and more I believe that things come to the men who go after them. Thousands upon thousands of our men are just sitting idly on their jobs doing only what they must, and it is too bad, too bad!"

I do not say that every country minister has all these faults. Many are gloriously free from any of them. The world is waking. The new morning is near. But, deny them who will, these things are still too true. I have known a wide range of rural churches intimately from my babyhood, and I know whereof I speak.

If those rural pastors of heroic nature who are doing right now the magnificent work we



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sigh for, think they are slurred by these pessimisms their eyes are holden. How could I more recognize their handicap than by pointing out the slight which is put upon their work by the general, though unconscious, assumption that their Herculean field is merely the apprentice shop, the infirmary, the waste-basket?

## DESPISED AND REJECTED OF MEN

WHY were such things ever possible at all? Why? Listen, folk! And hear it, O God!

Five words of Scripture will answer the question. We have not an adequate ministry, you say, because of inadequate support? In its place I will discuss that, if you ask me. I do not want to daub my theme with it now, for the cause runs far deeper than that. There is an underlying cause, stronger than gravitation, fatal as foreordination, sadder than death. Like Jesus of Nazareth, the rural church, the rural life is everywhere "despised and rejected of men."

"Where the quiet-colored end of evening smiles,  
Miles on miles  
On the solitary pastures where our sheep  
Half asleep  
Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop  
As they crop—  
Was the site once of a city great and gay  
(So they say)."

Tinkling home in the gloaming among the ruins, Browning's sheep remind us of our own lonely pastures. Never, indeed, from those pastures can be taken the smile of God's sun-

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light—either the burst of golden dawn, the blue abyss of noon, or the haunting afterglow—but as a center of human interest those pastures are sad pictures of the past. They are forever being forsaken. They have been the playground for baby feet, they have brought each hopeful son to a strong youth—

“But he looked upon the city, every side,  
Far and wide,  
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades’  
Colonnades,  
All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts—and then,  
All the men!”

And down to those cities and men he went, and he never came back. If he had business ambitions, the city was the mart where he must be. If he would excel in law, in the cities sat the courts. If he would be literary, there were the centers of publication. If he would be an artist of any kind, better any Bohemian garret in the din of a dirty city than all the garnet and gold of the autumn mountains where God’s blue heaven shines. Has he married a wife? He can give her a sweeter home in the glittering city than he could on some country hillside where the moon shines on miles of silver fog that fills the valley. The youth wants an education—away to the city

he goes, and he never comes back. For this he has the best of reasons—so have they all—but the fact remains that no matter what a radiance his life might have thrown on the hills of his home, he never comes back.

Never denying that this exodus is natural, we ask at last, Is it inevitable? Is there a defluency among men as in mountain waters so that one must go down to the city as the other runs down to the sea? Is it economic foreordination? Is all pleading for young men of great ambition to devote themselves to the country church just like pleading the pleasures and advantages of childhood? While you argue the case the child, predestined, grows to a man and the only way to stop it is to have him dead.

No, that is not quite the conclusion here. Is not man king enough to make his choices in so little a matter as location? He chooses and is gone.

The sputtering pen will never break the force of social and industrial gravitation, if such it is, and spitting against the hurricane is not one of my sports. But I know how the old minister felt who cried out in the pulpit: "This sermon will not change your conduct one whit and I know it, but it will do this good—before God here is a protest! I have freed my soul!" When, in watching the eternal cityward exodus,

I cannot help seeing that rural preachers are fain to lead it, I ask, Why?

The answer is perfectly plain. They despise and reject these poor rural charges as a field for their life-work. Ministers would not forever leave them for "greener pastures" if they had ever known what it was to love them supremely.

The country church is Pygmalion's marble woman. She will never live till a great heart loves her. The love will be a part of his soul, not merely his baggage check to a bigger charge. A city preacher, laboring under the impression that his friend was serving the largest charge (so called) which ever had been offered him, urged him to take special courses in some university to see if he could not fit himself for a "broader life" and not have to stay in little "Pumpkinton." He said, "Your people love you in this little place, of course; but you would find people to love you in better (!) places." But leave aside the thought of the love you receive. What of the love you give? The man who redeems the country church must, on one chosen spot, love it mightily and for many years.

Then, too, if the pastor gives to some little place the kind of love which alone can glorify it, he will not be able to transfer his affections

too often, too easily. Does a man leave a woman who loves him just because other women, perhaps fairer, will love him equally well when he finds them? Yes, he does, but he who does it is not the man who is keeping the faith. It is different, you say, with pastor and people? A pastor is so abounding full of Christian love that he loves everybody supremely, and it makes no difference where he is located? Don't fool yourself. It may make no difference where the creature is, but a big lot of this paraded semi-infinity of love is mere shallowness and utter lack of the same. Please don't bring my way any of that love which is mine merely because it is everybody's. I shall know you were never in the deeps of love. If you say that is the way God loves, the answer is twofold. First, you are not God; secondly, you are not right, for "He calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out." Until you love your people for their own sake, and because they are your own and not another's, you do not love them. Two girls were in a quarrel. "I don't love you a bit!"

"Oh, yes, you do!" was the answer, "for you are a Christian."

"Well," said the first, "I love you in a church way, but that is all!"

So long as you love your people only in the

ordinary church way, you may "whoop it up" behind the pulpit all you please, you will not save them from their sins. And you will not fool them.

When I say that country life is despised, I do not mean that people are hostile to it; they simply look upon it as inferior. They do not even feel interest enough to hate us—they pass us by as never worth their tarrying. Hear this, from the Boston Globe:

In the rural States of Indiana, Vermont, and Maine, the census figures declare that people live considerably longer than in large urban communities. Well, is mere length of life a proper measure of one's usefulness, and is it a guaranty of contentment? We believe that the publication of the census figures will not turn a single man back from the throbbing centers to those stagnant rural districts where some people who hold the original patent rights on narrow-mindedness live to be very old.

Vermonters read the Globe; there is *that* much excuse for this opinion that we are pinch-brained; but whether it is right or wrong, we are held up to contempt.

In the presence of two bishops, a divinity school, and the rectors of the Protestant Episcopal diocese of a great State I referred to the rural church as despised and rejected by the ministry. A prosperous city rector afterward challenged the statement. "Certainly I do not



despise the country church," he said. "Why, every summer I preach four Sundays in a rural church during my vacation. Of course nobody could expect me to leave my city work and give my whole time to such a church." This was a God-sent challenge, for it gave me the chance to answer: "What you say, just exactly as you say it, is the supreme example and perfect expression of just exactly what I mean when I say the country church is despised and rejected of men. We are the apprentice appointments of the young, the retiring 'easy' task of the old; we are smiled upon and condescended to in their leisure by the great, but they do not think us worthy of their life-work."

We have too much self-respect to care that a man should sit afar and emit inanity like the editor of the *Globe*, or that he should play smiling Jove like the condescending rector. Let the alien despise us; but the bitterly pathetic thing about the country church is that our own shepherds despise our folds and pastures. In all my own ministry I have never seen the least reason to doubt the absolute truth and general application of what C. O. Gill, after ten years of special investigation, reports in *The Country Church*:

THE COUNTRY MINISTER NEEDS A MORE LASTING INTEREST IN THE COUNTRY PARISH. In Windsor and Tompkins

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Counties the average country minister does not regard his task as permanent, but, rather, as a temporary stopping-place on the road toward a larger church. The value and significance of the service open to him as a country minister often escapes him, and the success he seeks lies elsewhere. Among the acquaintances of a single person were fifteen ministers of one denomination in Tompkins County, all of whom admitted they were not in their present field to stay. Another resident of the same county testifies that in more than thirty years he has never known a minister of a small parish in that region who regarded it as his permanent work.

What can such facts mean but that the ministers really look down upon rural work as beneath them? Where are the men who love it as Father Damien loved his leper islanders, as Grenfell loves Labrador? It is a safe conclusion that no man will greatly help what he sincerely despises. Whatever sacrifices it involves, there are ways by which any minister who really loves the rural work can stay in it. But most rural ministers, having their choice, would leave it. I have known many who with some degree of content are in the country places to stay as long as they live, but from nearly all these I have heard the unmistakable hint that it is from necessity. The lonely pastures are despised by their own shepherds. And what is the result?

When a man falls in love with a new sweet-

heart he is absent-minded toward the old. She may be in his presence, but she does not have all his thoughts, nor much of his love. The country church is the discarded sweetheart. This thing I have known to happen: A beautiful woman, of faultless dress and high ideals, became a vile, immoral slattern without even beauty of face, just because she was despised and rejected by the man to whom she gave her heart. Her experience is a parable of the rural church, despised and rejected by her ambitious transients. To the imaginative this word is sufficient.

But here, for the practical, is the result in terms of fact. Pastors hoping to be "promoted" to better charges (!) instead of making their own such, do not take up the duty of evangelizing their communities to the utmost limits as if their life-work lay in those single communities, in which case their future success would hinge on their present effort. Within narrower limits, these pastors do the more visibly successful things; such things as will soonest advance them from the place which they cannot redeem, because they are too busy getting ready to leave it with most worldly advantage to themselves. Doing such things, however petty, as may stick out like goiters in the church reports, they are not Herculean among the God-forsaken borders;

much less do they command forth into the byways and hedges the hundreds of unused church members whom it takes all their time to coddle. The work of both pastor and people is confined, like that of a fraternal order, to their own and those whom they may receive most easily. I once remarked that rural pastors did not care much for that outlying unevangelized ground dependent upon them or nobody. I was answered by a man who had just retired from six years of aggressive superintendency on a great rural district, "They do not care a *hoot* about it!" Yesterday morning I was told of bright-eyed intellectual young people in rural glens within one mile of an urban village church who had never seen the interior of God's house. Are there too few candidates for the ministry? Why? Let me say it again: Because the ones most likely to be called, the supreme, gigantic souls, if once they were called, inhabit to-day these same outlandish glens and mountains. Jesus of Nazareth passeth by and they sit blind on the lone Jericho road, for nobody has told them.

Pastors look upon rural appointments as beneath them. That is not the worst of it. While they are still serving those rural appointments, within just a few miles of their manse are the mightiest born leaders of the Christian

Church; but they will stay unconverted until they die, *because their pastors do not care*. Their eyes are otherwheres. Decades of successive short pastorates in this spirit leave the rural borders as the Rev. W. R. Davenport describes them in the official publications of the Vermont Conference Sustentation Society. Did I say the rural field was like a lovely woman become an immoral slattern because despised and forsaken? If you will not take it at my word, take it from these "Sustentation" statistics:

The conditions in many rural sections of the State are forbidding. The papers have recently told of an instance not many miles from one of our most prosperous villages where a lad of a dozen years had never heard of Jesus Christ. The writer, when visiting the schools of which he was superintendent some years since, found a fairly intelligent boy a dozen years old who had not only never been to church but had never seen a store. These are probably extreme cases, but the religious destitution and practical paganism of some communities, especially of places between towns, often a sort of no man's parish, are appalling. It is only when investigation is made that the facts are disclosed. And not a little of the recent crime in our State has come, not from the cities and growing villages, but from the sparsely settled sections where the children are never found in a Sunday school.

These conditions in turn react upon the churches which they surround. This is inevitable. Quoting again from the same source I

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find, following the names of twenty-five representative rural churches, this result:

In 1878 these 25 churches had 2,650 members and probationers; in 1888, 2,503; in 1898, 1,732; in 1908, 1,243. Thus it will be seen that these 25 representative Vermont Conference rural churches lost 1,407 members and probationers within the past thirty years, a net loss of 53 per cent of the entire membership. The same ratio of decrease would leave us without a church member in all that section twenty-eight years from now.

In the very next words Mr. Davenport proves by statistics that the decline is not due to loss of population, though there has been a slight decrease.

(Since quoting these reports by Mr. Davenport, I have myself found in a two-room graded school a lad of eleven years who found in his school book a reference to the cross. When he asked what "the cross" meant the teacher told him of the crucifixion of Jesus. "What! Did they tack him on, same as you tack pictures on the wall?" he asked with interest. Being told, his next question was, "Did he die?" This boy lived within stone's throw of a rural church.)

The Herculean rural task is beyond all puny men who feel that success and honor are in forsaking it. But the rural preachers are not alone to blame for this spirit. How often have I heard those who have attained prominent

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city pulpits toss some poor brother aside as unworthy of consideration, with the remark, "Oh, he is up at ——" —no matter where; so long as it is a humble country place, the last word about him has been said. If those who have taken what they are pleased to consider the more honorable place have no call to serve on lonely pastures themselves, will they not, for God's sake, hold their peace when tempted to discourage by such language those who will never serve elsewhere?

Bliss Carman, the greatest poet alive on the globe, tells

"How almost no one understands  
The unworldliness that art demands!  
How few have courage to retain  
Through years of doubtful stress and strain  
The resolute and lonely will  
To follow beauty, to fulfill  
The dreams of their prophetic youth  
And pay the utmost price of truth!  
How few have nerve enough to keep  
The trail, and thread the dark and steep  
By the lone lightning-flash that falls  
Through sullen murky intervals!  
How many faint of heart must choose  
The steady lantern for their use,  
And never, without fear of Fate,  
Be daring, generous, and great!"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Used by permission of L. C. Page & Company (Inc.), publishers.



If sometimes it is hard for inspired artists and poets to leave that work which would make them easily popular and soon rich, for the sake of their high immortal dreams, for which only ten men in a generation will care, it is not easier for the pastor to go up the steep by the lone lightning-flash when he knows he is despised (even if loved) by his inferiors whose obvious success he too could easily have surpassed in their own kind, if he had not, like a shepherd, given his life for the sheep—instead of saying to them, “Is this all your fleece? Thank you! Good-by!” For now and then a man is on the lonely pastures because he is great enough to choose it so, and God has need of him there.

As for those who made the scramble to be out of the country church as soon as possible, the cause alleged is, of course (though not in just these frank words), that one so mighty must needs (for the glory of God) go away to a larger field where there will be a greater scope for his powers. There are two reasons why this talk is not pleasant.

First, it is too egotistical. Not that I think my mentioning it will make any difference. Hardly. A person is exposed to measles, sickness, erupts, recovers. But conceit is constitutional and incurable. I may have mistaken

the nature and extent of your abilities? Possibly. But if you think you are too smart for the country church, you have said "Amen" in the wrong place. I do not care who you are; if you are any less person than Jesus Christ himself; if you are Moses, Saint Paul, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, or Napoleon, *you have not got brains enough* for this country job, this herding of cattle upon a thousand hills. You may be specially adapted by nature and training for the work of a great city or suburban church, specially unadapted for the work of the great open country; but that is not what we are talking about. To say that a man should leave the country church for a sphere adequate to his powers is too much like looking forward pleasantly to the time when one hopes to be acting chairman of the Holy Trinity.

Next, such talk is not only egotistical; it is false. Not intentionally so, of course. But we who, in spite of our boasted freedom, are the predestined from within; whose all-compelling emotions keep a little servitor whom we name Reason, and by whom we suppose ourselves to be guided; we can easily get that little servitor to justify as truth whatever looms as desideratum, whereupon we believe that he whom we unconsciously have persuaded is persuading our consciousness. Therefore whoever

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in his heart despises as small the work of a shepherd on lonely pastures can easily justify by reasoning a contempt which is ridiculous. It is none the less true that he is beneath that which he despises. He has aimed his contempt at the heavens.

“But their eyes were holden.” Blind as bats are all those who despise the opportunity of the rural church! With strong confidence in the truth of what I say, I maintain that the country pastorate is an unrivaled opportunity for the success of able men who stick to the plow. By success I do not mean attainment of money or fame, though I want to make it perfectly plain that I believe these will come to the rural pastor who knows his business as soon as to any urban pastor; by success I mean a deep, abiding, vital, and imperial power over the lives of great numbers of men. By the man who sticks to the plow I do not mean the man who does his best for a few years in a humble place and then is “promoted” to a more “eminent pulpit.” I mean the man who, to say nothing of consecration, has vision enough, yea, politic craft enough, resolutely to put aside every temptation to go forth and conquer the world; faithfully to labor long years unmoved from his humble place till the “mountain comes to Mohammed.” Such a

man knows that the foreordinations of God are sure. He is predestined from within. No conventionality in the mobs of man, no fatality of the stars in their courses can keep away from him any fame, any power, any reward which is inherently his. Such a man can afford at first to be misunderstood by his inferiors in more noted pulpits. He smiles at their untranquil ambitions (when he does not forget them), and is unmoved by their silly, unchristian grading of preachers. He does not ask to be given a greater charge which already is made; he is great enough to make one for himself out of the hulking primeval elements that lie at his feet. Like Him that cometh from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah, this man speaketh in righteousness, mighty to save. And when I speak of the country church as an opportunity for able men I do not mean men that are merely bright, well educated, and above the average in mental power; I mean the man who in politics would have been elected to the United States Senate from the minority party and without a dollar of wealth; I mean the ablest man who a few years hence will be consecrated bishop; I mean the man who, had he been a Roman Catholic priest, might have hoped some day to sit on the throne of the Vatican.

All the antecedent conditions of the country pastorate favor the triumph of this Lanfranc of the mountains. Have you never observed that, when an able, popular pastor leaves a church, his humbly gifted successor has a hard time? Or that, coming after a dull preacher of unsocial nature, a great-hearted, eloquent, brainy man has a thundering success?

“Rest after weariness,  
Crown after cross,”

is sure to make its impression on any community. And this latter case, pictured in individual instances, is on a colossal scale true of the whole country church. The nature of the ordinary rural ministry gives invincible advantage to the really great man who will devote his life to the rural work. Our men go from the country pulpit to great urban successes. Had they stayed, their successes would have been greater still. For the country church has suffered universally and constantly from a shifting, feeble pastorate.

The saints are thinly peppered over the rural pews, and if once in a great while some of them are cranky with unchristian foibles, feeble and inefficient in business organization, discouraged, or unevangelistic, what encouragement have they ever had to be otherwise,

in the fleeting changes of visionless leadership? Is the rural ministry flitting and insufficient? Do great areas of oblivion girdle every parish? Is the rural pulpit itself despised and rejected by "the sacred profession"? So be it, but every drear catalogue of fatal defects will but show more radiantly the opportunity of the rural pastorate by the same argument which distinguishes the style of Christ, the *a fortiori*—the "*how much more.*" If with so defective a ministry and organization the country church can be the power it now is, to what almightiness would it not attain if gigantic genius should commonly devote its lifelong service to rural reorganization. Because of the ambitions of the able and the defects of the feeble, the country pastorate is always shifting—is one long succession of experiments with greenhorns or worse. If under these conditions, with no possibility of the one thing it supremely needs—a continuous policy—the country church not only lives, but sends forth the workers of the Christian world, what barrier could limit its triumphant influence if it could command for many years in fixed locations the pastoral services of men able to sway the General Conference? It is a bugle call to any man born for a splendid career. One church so commanded would shine through all the nation to



the undying encouragement of the country ministry. Yea, all their eyes are holden who despise the country church as an opportunity for the most gifted minister that lives. Does not the fact shine forth like Orion that if such a man should choose the rural field *and stay in it*, his success would loom colossal athwart the great background of failure? Would not the greatness of his dominion be inevitable as the tides, the sunrise, the darkness, and death?

One winter twilight I was walking with a man who all his life had been pastor of great city churches, often at three thousand dollars a year, back when dollars had value. Newburyport, Boston, San Francisco; Portland, Oregon, and a church across the street from the capitol at Denver—these had been the places of his service. Sadly he said, "O that I had grown up in the country! If a man has ability in the country work, he is distinguished among his fellows. I have had big churches, but I am nobody—lost among multitudes just like me." So it is, and so it shall be. Carry your candle to the bonfire and nobody will look at it; light it in the mountain glens of midnight and it is seen afar. No eye can fail to see a leading "kindly light amid the encircling gloom." It is because of the weird



darkness of the background that the faces on Rembrandt's canvas shine in such vivid relief.

What will solve the rural problem? There is no such thing, never was, never will be. A problem may be worked out in steady progression until you write "Q. E. D.," and it is ended. Living things forever change, never end. This thing is a matter of life. Out from it the successive problems will chase each other forever, endless as the rolling surf, recurrent as night. No man or board of men will ever say, write, or do anything that will "solve the problem." They can only inspire men, each in his own place, to be in themselves and their labors a fit answer to the demands which will change before you can describe them.

But there is a sure redemption for every rural church. There never will be any other. The lone redeemer is an adequate minister. Men may sit at their office desks in cities or colleges and write rural solutions. Church boards may send down their richest programs, backed by generous money. Specialists may make thorough surveys. Local societies may build the finest parish houses to compete with or supplant the moving pictures, and to do all kinds of social work. What matter? If there is not an adequate minister in charge, the whole process is a colossal joke; the bigger the

program, the more ridiculous it is. If there is an adequate pastor in charge, he will see what are the needs of his church before you can get your mouth open to tell him, and his way of accomplishment will be wiser than all extraneous advice. All these other things are good—but the man is supreme and lone. He is the only need. All the others are so incidental and so dependent on him that the only effort for the betterment of the rural church which was ever worth the making is the effort to secure consecrated, gigantic men for a continuous rural pastorate. The careers of such men would be useful, triumphant, and happy, beyond all urban success, beyond all imagination.

Still, preachers will continue to forsake the country church at the call of ambition. But their eyes are holden. The old fanatic in *The Prince and the Pauper* whispers the secret that he has had the awful dignity of Archangel conferred upon him, and has seen the Deity face to face. Then, after pausing to give his words effect, he adds, "Yes, I am an archangel; *a mere archangel!* I that might have been Pope!" His kind are with us. They will all admit the divine dignity of being shepherd on lonely pastures, the sanctity of self-effacing service; but, after all, it is tedious business

being only an archangel when one might have been Pope. They desire to be among the mighty in the church. But even from the most selfish standpoint of ecclesiastical ambition their eyes are holden who despise the rural church. Fame and influence depend on the man, not on his location. A man's fame fits him like his underclothes. If it is too small, it will stretch. If too large, it will do as Uncle Hiram said of the blue overalls, "Oh, they'll pucker up in the wash." Whatever fame a man has is at last no more nor less than would have been his anywhere on the sod. It may be differently disposed. A man in the city may be known to more people; he is less to those who know him. It is the difference between so much water in a barrel or in a puddle. In the puddle it shows off better, it is sooner drunk up by the sun. The country preacher does not dry up. He becomes an unforgettable tradition of a more unchanging place—though mutation is everywhere. But I do not mean that his fame and influence shall be confined to his parish. There are so few great men who for a whole lifetime give themselves with consecutive statesmanship to the rural church that no fate whatever can keep down from his almightiness the genius who does it. I insist upon it that here as nowhere else it is true,

“He that loseth his life shall save it.” I will not believe our Lord was talking nonsense. “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” I am not yet far enough from the dreams of my youth to believe that a man’s greatness rests on anything but his genius and his loyalty, plant him by whatever lone mountain you will. I cannot forget that when Scotland remembers her shining apostle, it is Columba of lonely Iona; when the black race honors its redeemer, it is Lincoln of the backwoods; when Gladstone wanted the right man for the canonry of Westminster Abbey, it was Kingsley of Eversley; when Wesley sought the one man who could be his successor, it was Fletcher of Madeley; and the man who gives a patriot’s love and a statesman’s vision to the redemption of the rural work can be elected bishop in the Church of God from the humblest appointment within her borders.

And he will be great enough not to desire it.

## THE PICTURE OF PASTOR X

THE gloaming fell on Drew Forest. My lecture was over in the school of the prophets. Dr. Edwin L. Earp said, "I should like to hear you speak on this theme, What are the necessary qualifications of a rural pastor?" Instantly I recognized the most significant of all themes touching the country church. Wentworth's *Algebra*, the yellow old book with warts on the cover, used to teach us that  $x$  stood for the unknown. Doubtless the ideal minister is still Pastor X. But the question raised that spring evening on the campus at Madison makes me want to imagine him—the pastor I should like to be. Let us think, then, on the only proposition that is of any importance at all to the "country church problem"—as it shouldn't be called: "What elements are necessary in a rural pastor? What qualities within him foreordain his success, the absence of which will doom his failure?"

In this article we shall consider those qualities which relate primarily to his office as preacher and pastor; in another those which relate more to his spirit and personality. I have already made it clear that the rural pastor

needs to be a man of large intellect. He must also have:

1. *A wide variety of intellectual interests.*

The rural pastorate must be long enough to develop policies covering many years, and the preacher must not be monotonous or narrowed to a few themes only. But length of pastorate is not the reason for demanding variety; it is not merely a question of the bottomless barrel. In the heart of the city are many churches, ten or fifty. Doctor Blossom is a poetical preacher and little else; no matter, out of all the city he gets a full house of his kind. Those who do not like it can go elsewhere. Doctor Firebrand, of Theatre Row, is very sensational. It does no harm—those who do not like it may go elsewhere. Doctor Psychologicus likes to preach on the “Teleological Significance of our Subconscious Psychoses,” and it is all right; out of all the urban ant hill he will have his audience. Doctor Ephemeron is strong on topics of the day, Doctor Antiquarian on history. It does not matter what predominates over the mind of any city pastor, he will always find enough of his kind to fill a church if he is in a city. What is still more important, the people who do not like his kind of preaching can surely find a place to go where they can be fed with what they can digest. But if the

rural pastor who has solitary charge of the whole countryside should be narrow in his interests or have but a few themes or tones, he soon has a small and classified audience. The fatal thing about it is that the sheep of his pasture have no other green grass. The rural preacher must be able to minister to all varieties the human mind can take. He must be able to forage far afield from his own natural hobbies.

2. *Imagination* in large degree is necessary to the country pastor. Life is real, not academic, to folks who live close to nature and work with their hands. They do not care for abstract thinking. They may be as intellectual as their city brothers, probably would average to be more so, but the man who interests them in his preaching must put things with picturesque reality, vividly and concretely. Their own thinking is so. Hang your pictures on the walls of the soul and folks will look at them long after you are done speaking. Illustrative preaching is the first to grip, the last to be forgotten. When you were told that it was ninety-three million miles to the sun, you merely thought, "A long way—guess I won't go!" but you were astounded at such distance when you knew that an express train traveling day and night without stop would reach the



earth to-night if it had started from the sun the day Elizabeth took the throne of England; that a babe with an arm long enough to reach the sun would die past eighty before he could feel the burn by nerve-transmission. Early in the war someone spoke of a billion dollars, and it didn't mean much to us till we learned that there had not been a billion minutes since Christ was born. A minister told his congregation that the Christian population of the world was five hundred and fifty millions. They sat listless, imitating Homer. Then he made his facts alive and they listened. "Such an army of men marching single file past the door of the church, without rest day or night, would take forty-two years to pass; if stood in single file out into space, they would reach one hundred and seventy-eight thousand miles more than the distance from the earth to the moon."

"If your Honor wad but permit me," said old Edie Ochiltree to the Earl of Glenallan in *The Antiquary*, "auld Elspeth's like some of the ancient ruined strengths and castles that ane sees amang the hills. There are mony parts of her mind that appear, as I may say, laid waste and decayed, but then there's parts that look the steever, and the stronger, and the grander, because they are rising just like frag-

ments among the ruins o' the rest. She's an awful woman." It was pure imaginative description.

I remember speaking at the funeral of Maria V. Duke, one hundred and two years old. To moralize on the length of her life would have been dull, but there was a fascination in thinking that when our aged friend was born, King George III was still to have three years on the throne of England. It was the year when Madison gave way to Monroe. Only four Presidents had ruled our country and not a President since Andrew Johnson was then born. There were only nineteen States in the Union, not one west of Indiana. Scott and Byron were in the height of their fame. Wordsworth, Campbell, Shelley, Southey, Coleridge, and De Quincey were in mid-career. John Keats had not published his first book, and Charles Kingsley was not born. Among the little eight-year-old boys of the day were Charles Darwin, Edgar Allan Poe, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Alfred Tennyson, William E. Gladstone, and Abraham Lincoln. Browning and Dickens were only five; Thackeray was six. Mrs. Duke was nine years old when Adams and Jefferson died; ten years old when the first railroad in America was laid; twenty-nine years old when the Mexican War broke

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out; and Napoleon had gone to Saint Helena only two years before she was born. So one finds imagination useful even at a funeral. You have only to watch your older audience while you are preaching in an illustrative manner to the children, to learn how imaginative presentation of truth grips the heart. It is especially true of rural people whose thinking is pictorial and concrete. Most of the words of Jesus which survive are of this kind. Jesus was a rural-minded minister.

3. The rural minister must have *power over primal emotions of man*. These are still not only dominant but *evident* in rural life. Camouflage and artifice do not disguise them. Neighbors know their neighbors, and the pastor knows them all, the very heart. With endless variety of intellect and beauty of imagination one might preach, yet fail to move and grip and direct these forces of emotional power so that they result in acts of will. It is possible to be a highly entertaining rural preacher without rousing a passion for the kingdom of God and directing it into activity. The sharpest rebuke I ever received was given one Sunday morning by an old man who meant me a kindness. "I've been highly entertained this morning," he said. I forgave him, and later I buried him, but I never forgot him. There were no con-

verts that morning. Preaching must not only start the machinery of rural thought and emotion till it runs like the engine of the automobile; the clutch must be thrown in, so that there may be goings. "Let us go against Philip" is the test of oratory.

4. The rural preacher must be *evangelistic*. There is no way to keep a country church alive without the evangelistic tone in the pulpit and the evangelistic spirit in personal interviews. So often I have seen it transform a rural church.

I was not twenty-two years old when in May in the first year of my pastorate in little Glover our Epworth League signed pledges, each person by persistent effort to seek to bring five persons to Christ within a year. There was no plan or thought about special evangelistic meetings. But in October of that year we had to begin a series which lasted for seven weeks. Strong sinners were transformed. There were twenty-nine adult accessions to the little church. On two successive Sundays I baptized as many as could stand at the chancel.

In Plainfield I gave out some cards entitled "Personal Worker's Pledge," the legend whereon was this: "With God's help I will try my best to lead two unconverted persons to Christ in this present year. I will pray for them every

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day and will work for their conversion until it comes." If they cared to do so, I asked my people to write on the back of this card the names of those for whom they chose to be evangelists. This was to be in strict confidence, but it was done so that I might better know how to help them. I asked that no one choose to seek more than two souls (or three at most), so that there might be a perfectly definite effort. The pledges were signed and returned to me. There was no public announcement, no demonstration. The currents of prayer were rolling toward the great deep. It was in the midst of a political campaign, myself to be the elected candidate (by nomination from my own church), but we gave it no attention. The Almighty could manage that. Our citizenship was celestial. We were hounds of heaven on the trail. The house of God was crowded at the November communion. The altar rails were not long enough to hold one soul more than was baptized that morning. Seven times the altars were filled for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Vivid with reality were the words, "Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name, evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God

of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Glory be to thee, O Lord most high! Amen."

5. Another need of the country pastor—you may laugh if you wish, I do not know how else to say it—is an almost hypnotic *power of psychological suggestion*. Some men have this to a remarkable degree. Modern advertising uses it with great skill. Some ideas are strangely vital. They grow like weeds. The mind is fertile soil to him who knows how to use it. We educate by direct suggestion what we can, but that is not what I mean here. Find the thought that is germinal. It may be one wholly incidental (so it seems, but you know better) to the main purpose. Drop it in some fertile cranny of the mind that another man would not have recognized at all. Subconsciously, in the night as dreams are made, it will grow and bear fruit. Lives can be made or marred by this power. Such vital thoughts, dropped incidentally, have grown to bless me. One of them, in William Black's *Life of Goldsmith*, has taught me to look to my work, not to public opinion. "It is not what is written about books that makes their destiny, it is what is written in them." One weed-growing thought carelessly dropped by an elderly friend has maimed me, "And you know a man's friend-



ships are formed before he is forty." I speak truly when I say if now I meet a man who is past that age, I find myself confident that he will never receive me into intimate friendship. It is an unconscious barrier—it is foolish, I admit—but a weed-growing thought got caught in my soil—I wish it had been a better seed. The power of conversationally suggesting dominant thoughts is of great importance in the country. There are not so many distractions, amusements, varieties of brazen challenge to the attention as in the city. Country thoughts run deep, strong, unchecked. They ride like Jehu furiously onward. I have seen rural people absolutely obsessed. Sometimes it is by their neighbors. Sometimes it is by their fears. I knew a poor unbalanced fellow who thought each year that he had some new fatal disease. He once went to the physician, pulled off his shirt and asked the doctor to hunt for germs on his back. Vital evil thoughts had overgrown his sanity with nothing to counteract them.

Such power of suggestion requires great sympathy. Magnetize your man. Go into his soul with him. Throb with his thoughts. Lead him to your will. You will be surprised at your power. I was sent by the State Board of Education to reverse the policy of a very



determined principal of a State school. I was the listener. With all sympathy I led him over the long trail of his talk. In sly moments when he did not know it, I got my plan before him in a wholly incidental way which I seemed to forget while emphasizing other things. At last he, seeming not to realize at all that I had suggested it, made the proposition as his own. I hesitated. He argued for it until he was convinced, then I consented, on behalf of the Board of Education, to allow him to introduce the policy I was sent to enforce. He thought it was his own.

Rural pastoral visits are sometimes long. If they have any importance more than that of passing social pleasure, there are certain principles which should never be ignored.

1. *Do not often blame.* If you know a soul is guilty, lead him where he can feel the rebuke of God heavily as need be, but it is dangerous to assume to be the messenger of that rebuke. Above all things never assume that misfortune is a punishment of sin. Remember Jesus and the tower of Siloam. Remember Job. When he was in utter misery his friends thought, "Surely Job has sinned." God knew what they meant to do, so he sent a dream on purpose to restrain them, to make them stay at home and mind their own business. The voice

of a terrible spirit had said, "Shall mortal man" (that is, shall you, Eliphaz) "be more just than God?"—more ready with condemnation? Like all hardened hearts, Eliphaz thought the sermon fitted somebody else, and ran to trouble Job with the very dream by which God tried to command him to keep his mouth shut. Let us almost never blame—I do not say never, for I have been guilty. There was a man whose reenacted program was to be converted, to get wholly sanctified, to have the "latter rain," then to live again in a "backslidden state." His wife did not enjoy religion—at least not his. But the time came when, torn with cancer and near the grave, she longed to find God. Her husband was selfishly coddling his own feelings in a "backslidden state." I tried every gentle means I could to bring him where he could comfort her. Finally I said to him: "This is the last time I shall ever ask you. I have tried to bring you to God, and you know the road. I have talked with you, I have prayed with you. Your wife is dying and wants to find God, and you will not help her; it is the wickedest thing I ever knew; if you let her die without helping her to God, I shall believe you are a damned soul; I shall never invite you to God, I shall never pray for you again."

2. *Never minimize the sorrows* of another. A lecturer, Dr. Roland Grant, defended Job's wife somewhat in this way: If Job's wife had said, "O well, Job, cheer up! This isn't so bad as it might be. You might have had more boils," Job would have looked sourly over his topography and snarled, "Where?" When she said, "Poor Job! God is hard on you; there couldn't be one more boil on your poor body!" then of course Job said, "O yes! right there under the elbow is room! See?" If Mrs. Job had said, "Job, be thankful for the blessings you have enjoyed, and think how much worse off you might be," Job might or might not have cursed God, but he would have been sorely tempted to curse Mrs. Job, after which he would have nursed his miseries in proud sulkiness. But Mrs. Job is wise in comfort. "Curse God and die!" she says. She paints Job's woe as unbearable, very well knowing that his whole soul will rally in defense of God's goodness and in patience with his lot. However it was with Job, anyone who goes to a person in affliction and tries to cheer him up by asking him to think how much worse things might be has said the worst thing he could say, except one—and that is, "Think how many people are so much worse off!" The afflicted will not receive the comfort, but

he will spontaneously dislike the comforter, for he thinks him (in most cases rightly) unsympathetic. Suffer with your people to the deeps of grief. Never minimize their sorrows.

3. *Always encourage full self-expression*, whatever it be. It may be confession, it may be pouring out of sorrows, it may be just talk. Whatever it is, the place where we begin with any doctrine of ours is the place where self-expression ends in the other man. Try it earlier and your effort will be tossed back futile on the flood of his unburdening. These burdened hearts must unload. They must have their talk out in their Protestant confessional. Many a problem is solved in stating it. Many a grief is comforted in the telling. Many a man tells what a fine visit he had with his friend, but doesn't remember that himself did the talking. After full self-expression, if there is anything we should say, God will tell us, but the best comfort we give is given when we let some poor soul lay his burdens on us, just as we lay our sins on Jesus.

## KNIGHTS OF THE FAR COUNTRY

ON the green walls of my study hangs a water-color painting of Iona Cathedral. There is a soft radiance of golden sunlight on its ancient stone tower and walls. There is a white sail far out on the blue background of ocean. My lady of the manse, who painted the picture, has by its presence like a sacrament every day turned my memory to Saint Columba, lonely apostle of ancient Scotland. Then, with Columba of Iona, I see in imagination, one after another, those Knights of the Far Country who, turning their backs on cities and kingdoms which they might have conquered, gave themselves to live and die for humble folks in lonely places. Theirs is the supreme chivalry. I see Father Serra treading the lone reaches of *El Camino Real* from San Diego to the Golden Gate. I see Father Damien giving himself to die among leper islanders, while the poet Tabb writes of him:

“O God, the cleanest offering  
Of tainted earth below,  
Unblushing to thy feet we bring,  
A leper white as snow.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Used by permission of Small, Maynard & Company, Inc., publishers.

I see Grenfell among the fishermen who face death every year on the Labrador. I see the saintly John Fletcher, mighty-minded and descended from earldoms, burning out his bright life in the wretched village of Madeley. Looming with Washington I see Francis Asbury, now revered as a mighty bishop in the Church of God, then riding the desolate reaches as a lone pioneer in the utmost rural wilds of the world. I see him fording the rapid rivers full of tossing ice; braving the itch and the Indians; aching with fever; counting in delirium beyond the Allegheny Mountains the fancied houses where no houses would stand for fifty years to come. He had no home but the saddle and the pulpit. For forty-five years he rode five and six thousand miles a year—more than two hundred and fifty thousand miles, more than ten times the distance around the circumference of the world. Our bishops are mighty in labors. There are William F. Anderson in Boston; Luther B. Wilson in New York; Adna Leonard in Buffalo; Francis J. McConnell in Pittsburgh; Joseph F. Berry in Philadelphia; William F. McDowell in Washington; Wilbur P. Thirkield in Chattanooga, and Ernest G. Richardson in Atlanta. Up and down through the territories of all these men; twenty to eighty-four times into every State; sixty times across the Allegheny Moun-

tains, rode the lonely Francis Asbury on horseback, "crossing the last mountain, stemming the last river, to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to the last man"—riding "O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till the night" was done. I see John Frederick Oberlin, lone and immortal among the blue Alsatian Mountains. He has turned his back on cities and honors to find in the bitter poverty of the desolate Vosges the places where he can be most useful. There are no schoolhouses, and the people will not build them; so this man of God builds them out of his own pitiful pay. There is no bridge across the mountain torrent, no road to civilization through the wild forest, and the people cannot be persuaded to make themselves a highway. So John Frederick Oberlin shouldered his pick and begins work with his own hands till the people follow him and the road is made. The agricultural reforms which he cannot teach otherwise he demonstrates in his own orchards and gardens. Ridiculed, hated, threatened with personal violence by his own people; braving suspicion from without because of his pastoral loyalty during the French Revolution, he marches right on. For more than sixty years in that remote mountain parish, the sick, the poor, the wretched, the wicked are sheltered in his great love until,



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honored by his nation and decorated with the gold medal of the Legion of Honor by the king of France, he dies among a transfigured people that love him. His name is now revered by the Church of God to the ends of the earth. Such are the Knights of the Far Country. The King of kings is their Overlord. They are brave in the battle, not fearing oblivion. They ride forth, not asking reward. They are chivalrous to save the helpless and forsaken. These are they who have gone forth on lonely pastures to be pastors among God's poor.

The spirit of these Knights of God is the same that must transfigure the personality of the modern rural pastor. What outstanding characteristics must that personality show?

If, first of all, I say absolute *whiteness of soul*, holiness of character, you will think I am not speaking to the point, for that, you will say, is also a prime essential of the city pastor. Still I do want to insist that, in a manner beyond its application to the city pastor, any lapse in the rural pastor is fatal. In spirit and in essential righteousness there is no difference. In influence by circumstance there is a chasm. Little faults, or perchance foibles, in the personal life of a preacher may in the semi-incognito of a great city pass unknown or uncared for by his people. But out

in the hills interests are few and intense and human nature is stark naked and unashamed. Also everybody is encyclopedic about his neighbor's business. The rural eye is eerily photographic, the rural light is vividly strong, and the rural tongue has one quality in common both with the wind and with every one born of the Spirit, for it "bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof." Just now I am not resenting country gossip; I am recognizing an inevitable result of strong personal interest at close range, but it is easy to see what this will do to the man whose life is not up to the high and narrow standards set for him by folks who know him like a brother.

Benvenuto Cellini, through some optical illusion, after intermitting his sensuality with saintliness, believed that he had acquired a halo easily visible to the human eye, but he admitted that his halo could be observed more clearly in France than in Italy, which was his home. Home halos are best; radiance of holiness the brighter as we are the better known. If any man aspires to the divine dignity of being a pastor in the Church of God, in its most intimate relation, which is the rural appointment, he must be pure in heart, or his wall is Belshazzar's and the finger is writ-

ing. The reactions of his conscience must be instantaneous as flashes of lightning, foreordaining and stronger than steel. Numbers of men and women have wagered their faith on his. He is the nearest vision his people will ever have of how God is holy.

Behind the Old Brick Manse where I have lived for fourteen years is a great apple tree. One night in May I looked out upon it when it was in full blossom. The heavens were black and starless, the clouds were low, the very air was inky and blank. One thing alone I could see, for a strong Mazda light in a window shone full on that white apple tree and brought it out in radiant relief, vivid and ethereal, against the thick darkness of night, whiter than Easter lilies, whiter than snow. This is a black old world at best and the souls of its priests ought to stand out radiant in the light of Christ, against the black darkness of sin, whiter than Easter lilies, whiter than snow.

Great and tender *patience* must characterize the rural pastor. "The city pastor too," you say. Yes, it is one of many elements there, but it is supreme and strategic here, for there are three things which I insist we must never forget: the great intimacy of rural relationships, the great relative importance of the

single rural individual; and the Indianlike tenacity of human beings in remembering any slight or wrong, real or fancied. The rural pastor who would not thwart his own work has patience which suffereth long and is kind. People will be slow and stubborn; a man may feel that they are insulting him, when they do not so intend; and sometimes the real, unmistakable insult will come. But absolutely never must the pastor's patience break or bend. Even if he must be severe, it must be in perfect self-control, without shadow of impatience. Patience wins. Loving patience, putting its own imagination into the point of view of that other heart, avoids many a bitter regret. A man of national reputation in education told me that one girl in his college classes stirred his temper almost beyond control. He never asked her a question without seeing that she was whispering with her seatmate, even while he was talking to her. Just before the time when, deciding he would endure it no longer, he was about to give her a scathing public rebuke, he had occasion to visit her home. There he learned that the poor girl was so deaf that she could not hear her teacher's questions. Watching her face closely she saw when the question was addressed to herself and inquired of her seatmate what it was,

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that she might answer. To be patient a little longer was better than to break an innocent heart. A boy in a country school was very dull and absent-minded. At length his teacher learned that he was an orphan whose only remaining relative, an uncle to whom he was much devoted, had just died; and the woman with whom the child boarded said that every morning his pillow was wet with tears. To wait a little longer was better for that teacher than to discourage a broken-hearted boy. It is not otherwise with the pastor. Loving patience will lead to intimacy which will reveal the reason of all things. The kindest and most encouraging church member I ever knew was one whom at first acquaintance I dreaded and thought the most disagreeably critical. There was in my church an elderly woman (now in her grave) whom I had much disliked. I got the notion, on good grounds, I believed, that she was opposed to me and my work. I dreaded her. At length in a little circle where Christians were thanking God for their blessings this woman said, while her tears ran down, that the greatest blessing the year had brought to her was the return of their dear pastor. I felt like the old Roman in the first Latin book, who returned home and was met by his dog with bleeding fangs. He rushed into the

house and found the cradle empty. He ran his sword through the dog. Then in a closet he found his baby, safe and sleeping, near the mangled, dead body of a wolf. It is always better to be patient a little longer.

So far I have illustrated by those instances where the offense was imagined, for nine tenths of the cases are such. Not sentimental like these, now comes that other case, hard and unbeautiful, the real offense. This too must be tranquilly faced. Only those who understand the dominant individuality, the primal and lasting emotions of country life, can understand these two things: first, how big a rock is dropped into the stream of rural life, to make its cascade forever, by any lapse in long-suffering patience; and, next, how the influence of a pastor depends on "peace, like a river," attending his way down the stream of rural relationships.

And do not think that you will go undefended because you are not hot in your own defense. An old man (now dead, more's the pity, for I needed him!) sat down in the chair of a Plainfield barber and made a disagreeable remark about the pastor. The barber stopped his work, looked down into the lathered face and said, "If I couldn't say anything good about the best friend this community ever had,

*I'd keep my old mouth shut!"* Be a mountain, serene above the clouds, and good laymen and worldly folk with a command of language will make all the storm that is necessary.

No man need hope for success in the country church without a rich *sense of humor*. Ian Maclaren believed that this should be a part of any minister's examination for ordination. The humorous side of the country pastorate is worth its own chapter elsewhere, so here it will simply be said that the use of a sense of humor is not to afford amusement out of the abundant material at hand, and certainly not to make fun of the folk of the flock, but to save nerve frazzle and to give that sense of detachment which will prevent us from taking ourselves and our superficial troubles too seriously.

A fourth requisite is *genuine love for country people and rural scenery*. Poor, unschooled, and provincial some rural folks may be (are those in the city less so?); spontaneously near to nature they certainly are; but unless a man loves them and is one among them, he need not tarry. If with foreign missionary attitude and with his heart in the city, some transitory pastor tries to uplift them, he comes into bad odor more surely than if he walked the back pasture on a moonless night when skunks were



in blossom. The pastor who feels that his rural location cuts him off from advantages of the city is not rural at heart. Are the cañon-streeted cities full of opportunity, glare, and joy? The rural-hearted man knows these things as well as any man, and can even endure the city's advantages for a few days at a time. But all which the city can offer is forgotten in the advantages, tremendously more sublime, of living in the landscape. Would not I be an ass to choose narrow walls and call it opportunity? My mountains are blue as violets beyond the green hills; white lilies float on the sky-blue waters, and the gardens and forests are bright with emerald green, and sea green, and yellow green, and olive green and evergreen. And God comes down in October and splashes the forest with daffodil yellow and blood till the leaves fall and rustle over the vividly green hillocks of moss. I remember a woodland glade where rocks and fallen logs and standing tree trunks were all covered with green velvet, radiant with the sunset. I have heard harps of pine moaning to the winds of morning. I have heard the Aurora Borealis swishing eerily in the midnight, its great streams of white light flashing past the zenith all fringed with rainbow colors. Lighting the world in an ink-

black midnight, I once saw a bright blue meteor bigger than the full moon racing across the heavens till it burst into a thousand fragments and drenched the night with darkness. Once I saw the full moon reflected as in a mirror by the cloud just beneath it. I have seen the world blue with leaping lightning while God rolled his thunders between the mountains. Falling all day with a million thin lines down the spaces, I have heard the rain pattering on the roof and have seen it rolling in coffee-brown rivulets down the road. Yellow in the sunlight as the streets in the city of God, I have seen a pasture hill a thousand feet high and completely covered with waving goldenrod. I have seen incredible gold and crimson in the sunsets, followed sometimes by afterglow skies, radiant, ethereal and vividly *green*. I have seen the world buried in new snow which burdened the spruces, covered every twig with shining frost, and glistened on the fields like white linen dotted with diamonds. The afternoon shadows upon it are blue as the waters of a mountain lake, and sunset turns the new-fallen snow to miles on miles of rose-tint and amethyst. And when the long, wonderful winter is over, April comes and we hear the robin, the crow, the frog, and the bishop.

"Go watch by brimming river  
 Or reedy-marged lagoon  
 The wild geese row<sub>^</sub> their galley  
 Across the rising moon,  
 That comes up like a bubble  
 Out of the black fir-trees,  
 And ask what mind invented  
 Such miracles as these."<sup>1</sup>

So says Bliss Carman—so say we all. Can any city give us the piping frogs in the April twilight, the hermit thrush, the whippoorwill, or the golden robin? I missed Galli-Curci in Chicago, but I heard the song sparrow at home. O the fragrances of the open country—lilacs, new-mown hay, balsam trees, stacks of murdered lumber, wind off the fields of blooming clover, white daisies, or yellow kale in green waving barley! All these things the true rural heart will love till he would not surrender them for any wealth of the world. Chickens, calves, cabbages, and cats—good are these, and those who live among them. Selah.

Face to face we clash with the fads of the day when we mention the word, but without *otherworldliness* it is better not to enter the rural pulpit. Practical, a man of human nature and common sense, the country pastor must be, but that is not all. With novel airs

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<sup>1</sup> From *Songs from a Northern Garden*. Used by permission of L. E. Page & Company, publishers.

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of modernity and omniscience we are told to think less of the golden streets of heaven and more of making good streets in our own village. There may have been a time when such remarks were original and useful, but they have been stale a long time. The mold on them is as long as a cat's whiskers. A man whose congregation wouldn't congregate advertised in the newspapers that he didn't preach other-worldliness. Anybody, without genius, or heart, or imagination, can preach the dull didactics of this world, but deep down under our worldly exteriors we are men of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Temporal clatter is not enough. Our feet are "slipping o'er the brink," "our days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle," we shoot into the dim mystery of eternity with hearts aching for assurance of that kingdom beyond the stars.

John Wesley is an old man. When the Old Guard of the French army faced Wellington at Waterloo it had tramped the battlefields of Europe for twenty years; but for half a century this man who faces the congregation at Bolton has preached the Gospel of Peace down the valleys of England. He gives out the hymn:

"Come, O thou Traveler unknown,  
Whom still I hold, but cannot see;"

but as he reads the next two lines an anguish of memory comes. Ingham, Hervey, De-Lamotte, the friends of his youth, are gone; the bones of Whitefield are at rest across the Atlantic; Fletcher of Madeley is in his grave; and Charles Wesley, who wrote this very hymn, has been buried fourteen days.

“My company before is gone,  
And I am left alone with thee!”

At these words the wavering voice breaks—white-haired Wesley sits down weeping behind the pulpit and buries his face in his hands.

If loneliness overcame the triumphant old servant of God in the midst of his inspiring task, what can it not do among the lonely homes in the remote countryside where the people are not, like Wesley, mighty in faith, and where the task is dull monotony? One week in winter I rode through eighty miles of snow, preaching the Word, burying the dead. Could I judge the heartache of the mourner other than by my own? I once hoped my younger brother would be my companion in the ministry. Long ago on the last night of the old year I saw him die. Once I had a blue-eyed baby. I leaned over her little basket one morning and kissed her—and found that she was dead. Once I had a dear father.

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When he was broken in body and mind on the cross of disease, I leaned over the counter of a store in Rutland and read the black headlines that told of his tragic death. I have waded deep in dismal death. If I could ever have a pastor (as I have had to be one since I was eighteen years old) I should want him to bring me good news of the far country where there is no death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.

“O mine, my golden Zion!  
O lovelier far than gold,  
With laurel-girt battalions,  
And safe victorious fold!  
For thee, O dear, dear country,  
Mine eyes their vigils keep,  
For very love, beholding  
Thy happy name, they weep.”

Around me too are folks who have fought their temptations for twenty years and are not victorious yet. Even yet, even for them, is Jesus mighty to save? Strong confidence, triumphant faith in the invisible world divine—without these a man must not be a rural pastor, though every steeple falls. Redemption from sin through Jesus Christ, immortality, heaven, God, the comradeship of the Redeemer here and now—there are mountain peaks like

these, otherworldly, sublime. The rural church does not need those men who sit on ant hills.

Supreme and independent *courage* must be numbered as the next requisite. Noble is William Lloyd Garrison declaring: "I am in earnest. I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, and I *will be heard!*" Noble is William of Orange, commanding in the face of the foeman, "Break down the dykes! Give Holland back to ocean!" Noble is Garibaldi, offering his soldiers "hunger and cold and weariness, rags, blood, and death" —ere they follow him to victory. Noble is the iron-hearted old Andrew Jackson, one arm shattered by a musket ball, grasping a gun with the other hand and shouting to his mutineers: "Stand back! By the Eternal I'll shoot the first man that dares step from his tracks!" Noble is Henley, who sings:

"Out of the night which covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

"It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishment the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate;  
I am the captain of my soul."

But nobler are John Frederick Oberlin and Fletcher of Madeley, self-crucified on a cross



in the shadows; with no egotistic defiance of fate; with no exhilarant thrill of standing at a supreme moment in the face of the world.

In the eyes of a nation it must have been easy for the Iron Duke on the field of Waterloo to cry out: "Stand fast, Old Ninety-fifth! Old Ninety-fifth, stand fast! What are they saying about us in England to-day?" Bright idol of our cursed years of blood, it may have been easy for Saint Joan of Arc to die, crying out, while ten thousand men were weeping, "Yes, my voices were from God, my voices have not deceived me." It may have been easy for Master Ridley to "be of good comfort and play the man," knowing that he lighted such a candle, by God's grace, in England as shall never be put out. Facing Reginald Fitz-Urse and his thugs like a lion at bay, robed in the almost royal garments of his archbishopric, contending for the high dignity of God's holy church, it may have been easy for Thomas à Becket to pour his blood before God on the floors of Canterbury Cathedral. Torn by the wild beasts or flaming in the night gardens of Nero, it may have been easy for the early Christians to die in triumphant testimony. It may have been easy for them to lift high their weapons before the throne of ivory and gold, crying, "*Cæsar, morituri te salutamus!*" as they

went into the arena to die, for they knew that ten thousand eyes looked down upon them from that amphitheater, and far above the bloodthirsty Romans, far above Cæsar's throne of ivory and gold, far above the blue spaces of heaven they saw

"The lily beds of virgins,  
The martyrs' rosy glow,  
The cohort of the fathers  
Who kept the faith below."

But it is not easy for a man with the mighty ambition that goes with supreme power of character to turn his back on the world and go to the lone prairie and the mountain to give his life to God's humble poor, through long years of misunderstanding and disillusionment, far from the challenge of crisis or crowd, knowing that his name will never be heralded till he hears it new in the kingdom of God. Oh these are the true Knights of the Far Country. Forget your generals! Forget your martyrs! I know of but one courage like this. It is the courage of the poet. He sends his verse to the magazines. No editor wants it if it does not fill convenient space with conventional stuff. He sends his book to the publisher. It is rejected—gold will not trot on its track. He publishes a few volumes himself with scanty means wrung from his mountain garden. The

critics ignore it, for they do not know. Once in a hundred times they choose the good—once in a hundred times they doom the bad—it is all, and equally, by accident—they do not know—they cannot help it—God did not make them so that ever they could know. But foreordained by the kingdom of God, the great poet is serene. He waits like the mountains. He sings like the sea. Not for the poor honor of sitting in the Vatican or the White House would he give up the divine dignity of being the least of those immortals, whose mighty ones are Milton and Homer and David. Far down the dim moonlight of the ages he sees a path by which a wiser generation finds his house of song. He is kept by the courage of believing that his cadences will sing like the foaming deep, when the monuments of his critics are like the sand on the shore.

Not otherwise is the courage of the rural pastor. It rests on things unseen which are eternal. Its goal is far away. At first it is not hard. He is young, his comrades of youth are like him. By and by these follow the fashion. Some of them are famous in the cities; they cannot understand that their rural brother is not wasting the splendid promise of his life. It makes him lonely. Then the older relatives who have wanted to see him succeed

before they die wonder why he really so fails of his promise. The real significance of his life is not outwardly evident, for, mind you, if he is the abidingly successful rural pastor, *he is not doing the spectacular things now advocated by well-meaning people for a rural pastor to do.* He is running far deeper than these things, like rivers of water of life, into their immortal souls. And it is not easy to watch the cityward trend of your young people, like rivers that run to the sea. Forever sowing, most of your harvest is another's. But not all, if you abide. Your college classmate will go up on the bishop's platform and you will still be in your unfamed rural parish. But you will be loved beyond utterance in the humble hearts, and God will not forget your name beyond the stars.

Good night, dear brothers, shepherds on lonely pastures, knights of the Far Country. I do not know whether I have told you what the true country minister is like—God knows I have told you the pastor I should like to be. In the glens and mountains there is labor enough for me—the only city for which I look is the “city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

## PASTORAL TRAILS

LONG ago, down pastures that slanted toward the sunset, I called the cattle home at evening. I was a barefooted boy home from school and hungry, and, leaning on the bars, I watched the cowpaths near me meeting like rivers on a map, far away branching wide on the green hillside. To-day my pasture is metaphorical. Shepherd of a kind then unknown to me, I trace the branching trails past the homes and into the sorrows of my rural folk. Come with me.

The rural pastor's work is to befriend and influence men, wherever he finds them at the sympathetic moment. The most effective pastoral visits are sometimes made on the street corners and in the grain fields. I am not under the delusion that I am telling anything new. Some time ago a religious paper featured the work of certain pastors who visited men in the fields and swung pitchforks while they talked with laborers at their tasks. This was heralded as a new, redeeming vision in the rural pastorate. I read with amazement. Did not the good editors know that never had the

rural pastors done otherwise? I cannot remember when this was not common with all those who under any circumstances *could* mingle with men. Those who live in the country (not as a part of well-planned duty in "uplifting" but naturally and inevitably) must like, and be like, plain country folks. This gossipy casual association is one of the delights of the pastorate. It certainly gathers rich folklore and traditions.

One bright blue afternoon I was pitching on a load of hay for a farmer friend. Golden grain was waving near, and Spruce Mountain stood magnificent above the green woods which ran down the Brook Road. The field sloped down to a green swale and my friend on the load took up his parable:

"Will Perry, he came over to mow grass for Dan Page once, and it was in that swale, and hadn't swung the scythe three times 'fore he said: 'Gosh, Dan! Haint ye got no rubber boots I could get to wear?'"

"'Why, yes!' Dan said. 'You go up to that shed and just inside the door to the right you'll find my pair. Put 'em on!'"

"And by and by Will came back kind o' mumbling and said, 'I couldn't find no boots!'"

"'Well, by Gosh, no!' Dan said, 'I got 'em on myself. Didn't think of that!'"

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I was going home past the village inn carrying a loaf of bread when the innkeeper said: "I never see a loaf of bread without thinking of a prayer meeting in Topsham when I was a boy. The old deacon leading the meeting spoke of bread as the staff of life, when his wife whispered to a neighbor so loud you could hear her all over the meeting, "*Taters is mine!*" After this story the innkeeper's talk drifted to that richest of all mines of rural tradition, the red schoolhouse by the road. Here the boys played Tag in the summer and Fox and Geese in the winter. In the winters of auld lang syne the big boys came to school, up to the age of twenty-one. This added to the interest, if not the effectiveness, of discipline. One day the man-grown lubbers were told that on Friday they must "speak pieces." Not wishing to do this they put their heads together and plotted against the day. It came, and they were ready. The teacher called the name of a pupil nearly six feet tall. He went out before the school, made his bow, and spoke:

"Niagara Falls  
Is wide and deep,  
And it would be a good place  
To wash out sheep."

After a profound bow, he took his seat and



his successor was called forward by the grim teacher. His oration also was brief:

“God made squirrels  
To run on a rail.  
God made puppies  
To catch 'em by the tail.”

The success of the third was not so distinguished. He bowed low and began—

“When I lays on my little bed—”

“Take your seat!” shouted the teacher, and the entertainment was over.

Whenever it rains, one of my townsmen remarks, “Well, I see the brother is busy.” The reference is to a joke he has on me in his story of an old presiding elder to whom a widow offered the hospitality of her cottage for the night. In the morning the preacher asked what kindness he might do in return. Now the season was very dry and the widow suggested that he pray for rain to save her garden. He promised, and rode away. Soon there was a cloud-burst which washed all her cabbages into the river. She looked out upon the ruins and cried “O dear! Those Methodists always do *overdo things so!*”

Such are the enjoyments of casual conversation which I mention, not to string story after story, but to show the comradeship of the

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country neighborhood and the homeliness of its traditions, sunshot with humor or tender with pathos, where one lives again *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* or *The Heart of Midlothian*. I would not tell such things to poke fun at these country folks, for I am of them, and I love them. They are my people, and their God is my God.

How often too is the life and conversation of the countryside rich in literary material, or deep in religious value! I shall never cease to reproach myself because long ago I failed to jot down scenes from the conversations of John McDonald, a preacher superannuated in my first parish, where he used to tell me traditions of the fathers in days when the camp meeting was in its glory and revivals were mighty.

One of them was of a hard-hearted man who openly defied the power of God in a revival meeting. In strong, jubilant chorus the congregation joined, then knelt in impassioned intercession. The terrified sinner ran like mad out of the meeting. It was a rainy night of November, but, like Cain fleeing before Jehovah, he ran till in a remote field he knelt in the mud and stubble among some ungathered stooks of corn. The conviction of sin was tearing at his heart. All night in that corn-

field he wrestled like Jacob with the angel, till sin had broken his heart. God forgave his sins, just as gray dawn came over the mountains.

Another story was of a schoolhouse meeting which a wicked man tried to break up by throwing stones through the windows at the old-fashioned lanterns within. It was in the edge of the backwoods, but Heaven was moving among those rough benches. The worshipers prayed till suddenly their persecutor rushed into their midst asking them to pray that his soul might be saved from hell.

I never shall forget the light in the face of that white-bearded old preacher when sometimes he spoke of the city of God, nor the awfulness of his eye when he warned of "eternal burnings." He told me of a great conference on Lyndonville Camp Ground long ago. The sun threw shadows of the leaves over the white canvas roof of the great tent, but the audience was all aghast with terror at a sermon on the text, "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." Long afterward I remembered it with melancholy reflection, for the old man was dead, and it was the last week of meetings ever to be held on that camp ground. I stood on the platform where the fathers had thundered. The congregation was thin under the dimly lighted tent, the great moon rose, blood-

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red, over the maples, and the camp fires were burning to red embers all around us. The "faith of our fathers" is "living still," but their works have passed away.

There is another class of people thinly dotting the country parish who are rapidly passing "into the world of light," but who have treasures of tradition, when gifted to tell it, rich as what Scott gathered in the border ballads of Scotland. These are the soldiers of the sixties, about whom our grandchildren will ask, and we cannot tell them. One of these would have saved a joke on himself if he had told the history of the past instead of criticizing the present. (He was not of my parish or I would not let you laugh at him.) When the rural council gathered in the country store, a veteran, jealous of our Sammies in khaki, said: "These soldiers *now* don't have no such hard times as *we* had in the sixties. We had nothing to eat but hard tack, but they are sending these boys sugar, and coffee, and beans, and nice white bread and everything good to eat, and now I see they have just got some new kind of food. I read yesterday that they had sent them *pajama*."

Humor in one, heartache in another. One day I met an old soldier coming from the cemetery. Through the Civil War he had

served in the second battery of Vermont Light Artillery and was a veteran of Port Hudson. I had heard him tell of the fierce bombardment when armies dug and burrowed into the ground like woodchucks, to be sheltered from the shot. This old man was my friend. When against the noise and opposition of half the town I was trying to put a park in the center of our village he helped me set the trees and, though very lame, he lugged water to them every day to make sure they should not die. Once he sent me a card, while enjoying the only vacation he had taken for years, saying he was having "a grand, good time, but would surely come back in time to vote" for me. This was volunteered information, for I never talked with men about their votes, but the reference was to an election which sent me to the Legislature for the second time, and since no other representative had been reelected he wanted to make sure that I did not fail.

"Were you going home?" I asked. "If you were, I will go with you and we will talk about that pension now."

He needed that someone should write to Senator Dillingham for him. His pension had never been adequate and now he was sick and old, and nearly blind.

"Yes," he answered, "I've been up to the graveyard." Then he broke down and cried. Two months ago he had buried his wife.

We went into the home where he was living all alone. His son was fighting for his country with the American Expeditionary Forces in France.

"I've got a letter from the boy," he said, "but I can't read it. When Emma was here she was eyes for me."

I read the long and interesting letter to him, a letter which showed that the boy did not know his mother was dead. I described the pictures on the cards it inclosed. Then I unfolded the white silk handkerchief embroidered with lace. A shock went over me. This was hard, cruel business, but he would have to know. "Can you see this circle of bright colors?" I asked. "These yellow points are the ends of the flagstuffs. Here is Old Glory beside the banner of England, and here is the flag of Belgium; this is the flag of France, and this is the flag of Italy. They are all draped together in the center, and this embroidery in old English letters underneath them is—is the words 'To my dear Mother.'"

Then the tears of his desolation ran down like the rain and the old man whimpered like a dog.

It was Henry Vaughan who

“Felt through all this fleshly dress  
Bright shoots of everlastingness,”

and I too, when comforting my people on the last and loneliest trail, have sometimes felt strangely, weirdly near that everlasting world.

I have been out on the hills calling among homes when, just as if a strong hand were laid on my naked heart, I would be impressed that I ought to visit a house perhaps in a district which I was not intending to touch. Never have I failed to find that this strange tugging at my soul was serious with awful meaning. It does not come often, but I have more than once obeyed it to the comfort of dying men. In one case I did not know the man existed till I went at this call. Once I disobeyed it. I was a student pastor at South Barre, nineteen years old. A deep impression clouded me with its very heaviness that I ought to visit the home of a Mrs. Wark, a woman seemingly perfectly well and the mother of a happy family. Dreading at that age to do any calling, I postponed it for a week. The next Saturday I was coming from school to my charge when a South Barre boy leaped from his bicycle to the ground beside me. “Any news?” I asked him.



His answer stunned its way through my heart. "Yes. Hadn't you heard? Mrs. Wark is dead."

I do not want to insist on this thing, but I am not the only man in whom I have witnessed this experience. When I came to Plainfield the Congregational Church was open and the Rev. Perrin B. Fisk was pastor, a broad-minded, highly educated old man, not given to superstitions. In a Sunday-evening union service I heard him preach an intensely solemn warning of sudden death. He said that he felt strangely impelled to preach that sermon. Once before he had done so under the same compulsion and could not avoid taking the hand of a man after service and saying, "I wish you would take this sermon to yourself." That man was dead in three days. After telling this experience, Mr. Fisk continued, "I do not know for whom on this second occasion this warning is sent, but I can't help feeling very deeply that there is some man right here to-night to whom God sends this last message." That was Sunday evening. Friday afternoon a man living twenty rods from the church was crushed to death on the railroad.

A few years ago a physician practicing in my parish asked me to ride out under a wooded mountain to visit a patient he was trying in

vain to help. She had hallucinations. She knew that she was dead and God would not forgive her sins. I went into the room and told her that her pastor had come to talk with her. With glassy eyes she stared at me through the twilight and said that she was glad, but I was too late—she was dead and God would not forgive her sins.

“Are you willing to talk with me about it?” I asked.

“Yes,” she answered, eagerly.

“Then listen hard. Can’t you remember when you were sick and feverish and you dreamed some awful thing was chasing you and you couldn’t move, or the rocks were falling on you and you couldn’t move, and it all seemed true, but it wasn’t true, and was just a bad dream because you were sick? Do you remember it?”

“Yes, it was just that way.”

“Well now, right now, it is just like that too. You are sick and you think you are dead, but you are not dead; it is just like a bad dream because you are sick.”

A flash of intelligence came into the vacant eyes. “Is that the way it is?” she asked.

“Yes, that is the way it is.”

“But God will not forgive my sins,” she cried in despair.

Her daughter was by the bedside. "Do you love this girl?" I asked.

"Yes, she's my girl."

"When she used to be naughty and you whipped her, after she had cried a long time, did you forgive her and love her again, or did you keep right on punishing her, and never let her think you loved her any more?"

"No, no! She's my girl!"

"Of course she is. Now, can't you understand that you are God's girl, just as this girl is your girl? Don't you remember 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him'? Just as you love your girl and forgive her, God loves and forgives you."

The dull eyes brightened and she asked eagerly once more, "*Is that the way it is?*"

"Yes, that is the way it is. You have been punished long enough, and God will forgive now. 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercy will I gather thee.' Do you want me to pray for you?"

"Yes, I do!"

The waters had been too deep for me, but I went right through. I prayed and found God. I prayed not only for healing, but for forgiveness. As sometimes with our consciousness and sometimes with our subconsciousness, so,

for aught I know, we may sometimes with our hallucinations know ourselves best. I faced straightforwardly toward God and found him with the poor troubled soul at my side. Great comfort and peace came over her. Her delusion was gone. She was happy in the fullness of pardon.

As we rustled home through the October leaves I told the doctor, who had not been in the room with us. He only said with a smile: "Oh, yes! She is all right now, but I know her case. The delusion will all be back tomorrow, bad as ever." I did not dispute him.

That was years ago. I have carefully inquired of the woman's relatives. Call it by whatever coincidence or accident you will, *from that moment her delusions never returned.*

In July, 1911, on the last afternoon before I was to leave for a summer vacation at Hampton Beach, I was looking over some manuscripts which it was imperative for me to complete that day. I was excited at the prospect of my first glimpse of the ocean. My parish was farther than Greenland from my thoughts. I had no further duties to perform in it before I left. Suddenly between me and my papers came the thought of a certain man, so vividly, so all-consumingly that I could not drive my mind to the consciousness of anything else but

his image. The man had not once been present in my thoughts for months, though he was a godless, profane man who never came to church. I knew the call full well. Dropping my papers I hastened to the man's home. No news had reached me of his illness though I had known he was always frail. I found him on his deathbed, desiring to repent and give his heart to God. I baptized him that day. Death followed close on my track.

I have no words to tell you how direct, how intimate, how personal I believe is the companionship any pastor may have with the "Holy Spirit, faithful Guide." Such experiences as I have told may not be frequent, but the pastoral trails over the loneliest pasture will be bright with the glory of God, just as really in the common duty as if there were a supernatural message for each moment.

No true pastor feels that he is giving more than receiving. In a ministers' club I told of the great help I got for my pulpit ministry by visiting my people. In all seriousness a city pastor remarked that his experience had been that the majority of his parishioners didn't have mentality enough so that any part of their conversations *could* be incorporated into his sermons (!). Oh, the poor ninny!

When I get disgusted with some one of my

people, when I think he is "cussed" to the bone and his funeral would highly adorn the sanctuary, then I know it is high time I should pay tribute to His Excellency the President of the Livery Stable and drive forth seeking intimacy with the abominated brother. Together we perform a dissertation on the faith of our fathers and a degustation of dandelion greens. Then, abiding in love, I drive the sorrel horse home through the green gloaming.

When I think it is a hard lot to be a country pastor or become discontented through worldliness, I take from my pocket a gold Waltham watch and think of the friend who owned it long ago. We were schoolmates together in Montpelier Seminary. Far beyond mine was the clearness of his strong mind; far beyond mine was the grace God had given him; and his chosen work, like mine, was the ministry. Keen of thought, clear and eloquent in speech, pleasing in person, no young man ever faced a more splendid career. Then the white plague put its hand upon him, and he went home without a murmur to his mountain farm.

I became his pastor. One Sunday morning he asked me to visit him. "What day will you come?" he said, and I answered, "I will come Thursday." With joy he turned to his mother: "Brother Hewitt is coming Thursday!" Yes,

that very Thursday I did go—to preach his funeral sermon. When his mother was praying God to spare the life which was temporal she cried, “O God, save my boy!” The young man heard it and said, “He does save me, mother!” but he spake of things unseen which are eternal. His last words were, “Tell the young people I love them and want them to come to Jesus.” Over his coffin I gave them the message, but his message to me was one that he never knew he gave.

It was in the winter before he died. The warm snows were thawing in the gray afternoon around the little schoolhouse in the edge of the woods. Here the young man taught school. I was his superintendent as well as his pastor, and I was making an official visit. It was on a day when I was ambitious and uneasy. I was pastor of a church of only seventy-four members, in a little country village, and I wasn't getting on in the world at all. For a moment I had forgotten that God was letting me do the work which had been the dream of this splendid young man six years my senior, who now could do nothing but teach four poor, homespun little children—that was all. The school was over, the four pupils had gone, I had inspected the register and was ready to go—still bitter at the littleness of my oppor-



tunity, when my friend said: "Brother Hewitt, won't you kneel with me on the floor and ask God's blessing on what I have tried to do to-day? I never dare leave the great responsibility of teaching these children without asking God's blessing."

The four little children have changed so that I shouldn't know them, and their teacher has been twenty years in his grave, but I have never thought of that winter afternoon without wishing my soul were pure as Vernon Clark's. For he could do the humble task "with eye single to the glory of God," happy in believing that nothing was greater. *Oh, how right he was!*

Surely we ought to be at least as devoted as the best of those to whom we minister, and not less holy than Francis of Assisi was this poor man whose story the Rev. Leon Morse, of Somersworth, told on Hedding Camp Ground:

"Up in the Green Mountain State there lived a Methodist who really loved his church. He was a farmer, who, in common with his neighbors, had to get up at four, or at the latest five, o'clock six mornings of the week. But, unlike them, every Sunday morning he arose at half-past three to do the chores about the place, and drove seven miles to church with

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his family, stayed to Sunday school, and, if possible, returned to the evening service. And this he did for nearly twenty years, until in a new home his Sunday drive was only six miles.

“The church was so close to his heart that his favorite hymn seemed perfectly natural to be repeated anywhere by him, and probably no quotation aside from the promises of Holy Writ fell from his lips more often than the words:

“ ‘I love thy kingdom, Lord,  
The house of thine abode,  
The church our blest Redeemer saved  
With his own precious blood.’

“He was a steward in the church. Once the vice-principal from an institution of learning, who had been placed on the board of stewards, asked what his duties would be. The reply was characteristic: ‘My brother, the principal duties of a steward in the Methodist Episcopal Church are to pay the bills no one else will meet.’ He had already proved this statement, for, at a fourth Quarterly Conference, when there was a deficiency in the minister’s salary and the other brethren had decided to let it remain unpaid, after all were through talking, he arose and said: ‘Brothers, you all know that I am not a rich man by any means, but our pastor is going to have his salary if I have

to pay the deficiency myself. It is all wrong for a church to be dishonorable in business transactions.' That deficiency was met right away.

"There came a time at last when he was absent from the church. Sad hearts knew why. Friends gathered at the home. The minister came, and the words from the text of comfort were these: 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.' Stewards of the church stood together near the door, and one of them laid a rough but most kindly hand on the shoulder of a griefstricken youth, and said with trembling lips: 'What shall we do in the church without your father?' And the lad replied, between choking sobs, 'I don't know.'

"That scene will never leave my memory. I was that boy. Oh, church of my father and of my father's God!

" 'For her my tears shall fall;  
For her my prayers ascend;  
To her my cares and toils be given;  
Till toils and cares shall end. "

"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife" they spend their fameless days, unhaloed saints of the humble home; but when storms beat wild on the house of God, blinding

even their pastor's faith, such men stand around him like the Rock of Ages. They are the true rewards of pastoral labors.

Long ago in the Holy Land, there were two brothers, and the elder said: "I am rich in houses and lands and have none to feed but myself. My brother is very poor and has many mouths to feed. I will go out by night and carry my sheaves into his field." But the younger said: "God has abundantly blessed me with many little ones to love, and my brother is poor and lonely, and has none but me to love him. I will go out by night and carry my sheaves into his field." At the far ends of the fields they began, and at first neither knew of the other's labor, but at last, in the light of the Harvest Moon one night they met and let fall in astonishment their last two sheaves, each at the other's feet. And the legend is that on that spot made holy by love the Temple of God was built. So the country pastor takes to his people his sheaves of labor and love. So he meets them bringing their harvest of love and labors. On any spot sanctified by this interchange of munificence a temple of God may rise, its snowy steeple standing high among the green hills, its invisible dominion reaching beyond the stars.

## BUBBLING OVER

NOT until you are out of sight, perhaps, for I am writing of the humorous side of the rural pastorate. It may appear almost anywhere. In the most solemn moment of one of my prayer meetings a good old man rose, looked me steadily in the eye, and testified that when he was young he "was *adapted* to strong drink." When he had finished I said "Amen," exerted my self-control until I reached home, then walked the floor and let myself go. Another brother, discussing the question thrice asked of Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" said, "This was the time when Peter expectorated his sin." One of my good church members, reared in Italy, was describing a woman brought up in the cloister who later came out into civilization and for the first time saw a man who did not wear long robes. "My sake! but I was scared. I had never seen a man wid pants on before!" The Rev. F. W. Lewis tells me of a man who suddenly jumped up and said, "As I was settin' on the thought a settee struck me," and of another man who wanted to be, like John the Baptist, "a bright and lining shight." But the most ludicrous

instance I know is when a half-witted woman in northern Vermont, who never knew the meaning of the words she used, drawled out, "If it hadn't been for the stupidity of God we should all have been in hell long ago!"

Sometimes it is the minister himself who makes the bad break. When I came to Plainfield twelve years ago I preached a bacca-laureate sermon with the rather original and startling doctrine that one should do the work for which nature fits him. "All the failures in the world," I cried, "come from misfits!" If I had not forgotten that the most successful teacher in attendance was a Miss Fitts I should have understood the broad grin which ran across the congregation. In pastoral work I have done as badly. In the county jail at Montpelier I was trying to persuade a Frenchman guilty of murder to take his sins to the Lord. Thinking I meant the Hon. William A. Lord, attorney for the prosecution, he vehemently protested, "Na! Na! Lord, he bad lawyer!"

Another Frenchman nearly broke up a service for me in Glover, Vermont. He was the janitor and the church was overheated. A man in the congregation stood on the back of a pew to lower a window. The old janitor, jealous of his prerogative, jumped up, clapped

both his hands on the hip pockets of the other man and wheezed out in a whisper heard distinctly all over the church: "You let dat wind' alone! I have feex him all right!"

A rural minister of English origin drove into his yard and leaving his sleigh for a moment entered the house, to find his district superintendent there. After chatting a while he suddenly remembered his unhitched horse and said, "Hexcuse me! I must go out to the barn and itch!"

Years ago I called on a man of very talented appetite who, after he had shoveled himself full during a long meal, suddenly exclaimed, without intermitting his efforts in the least, "Well, by Gosh (bite), I guess I won't eat no more, by Gosh! (bite) for fear I'll (bite—*crescendo*) blow up!"

A farmer was suddenly omitted from creation by the kick of a mule, and one of his neighbors called out to another, "Say, did ye know Zeke Allen's dead?"

"What! Zeke Allen dead? By Gosh, no! It's more'n fifty dollars damage to Zeke to die now before he sells them pigs."^

Speaking of mules, I have been richly blessed with the acquaintance of some of the crazy little snapity-pop sects who harrow up the country side with their eccentricities. One



of the "come-outers" labored to rescue me from the sin of having a subject for my prayer meetings. It was all wrong, he said; "Jesus Christ didn't talk on no subject." Another of their devotees came to my garden as I was racing with the twilight picking up potatoes I had dug out. A long time he stood and talked incessantly. Suddenly a silence fell upon him, then he exclaimed, "Why, I don't know but it is the Lord's will I should help you pick up potatoes!" Not willing to deny so wholesome a doctrine, I had his help and we soon finished. We fed him on onion stew and he unburdened his heart. A believer in the miraculous gift of tongues, he said they were going to put him out of the synagogue because his gift was of the devil. He had said "Tic-tic-tic-tic!" when the Spirit came upon him while the others said "Toooo-toooo-tooo!" But he sang them down and had the victory. But his gift was of the Lord, and there wasn't anyone sufficiently gifted to interpret him, and he rather guessed their gifts were all of the Lord up on Maple Hill, excepting Tib Holt's gift of tongues—he thought Tib's gift was of the devil!

This man, or one of his kind, came down to the village to labor with an old and highly educated Congregationalist minister who ran greedily after the error of Balaam in believing

that the world was round and turned over every day. These poor little sects go spinning their crazy gyrations alone. Out on a desolate mountainside among the stumps and boulders with only half a dozen houses in sight, I know a spot where two chapels stand four-square against each other's heresy right across the road, like Paul withstanding Peter to his face because he was to be blamed. One of the intermittent ministers told me that the other pastor had closed his church till February because one of his hearers had gone down to New Hampshire. Thinking strange, I inquired and found that there were only two persons in his normal congregation and the other sister thought the sermons might be too personal. I next learned of my reverend informant himself that he was soon to be married. As he was past fifty I ventured the opinion that this was a matrimonial relapse, or second marriage. "Well, er—yes," I was told. "Brother T—now has a wife but he will be married as soon as he can get the divorce."

These sects have strange doctrinal hobbies, and so long as one deports himself strictly on the mooted question he may accommodate his other conduct in a manner to shame Mark Twain's "sophistical cuss." The latter certainly is distanced in these arguments, too rich

to omit, which I cut from the Sheaf, published by the Firstfruit Harvesters. The pastor is defending his act in marrying divorced people, contrary to the rules of his sect. "We pray the blessing of the Lord to attend this union. There has been some criticism among our people regarding this marriage, and as it is known that Sister Martha has been twice married and divorced, some of the saints have failed to see how I could sanction the marriage by performing the ceremony. Her former marriages were before she became a Christian. God in his Word concerning marriage and divorce, is giving instruction to his people, and not to the Gentile world. Nevertheless when one is converted to Christ, they should then commence to walk by the same rule. Applying that to our sister, the first man she married was her husband according to the laws of the land, and according to the Word of God. The second man was her husband according to the laws of the land, but according to the Word of God she was living in adultery. When the laws of the land divorced her from this man he was not her husband any longer in a legal sense and according to the Word of God he was never her husband. Having repented of her sins and being saved through the precious blood, and the first man being dead, who was

actually her husband, we consider her at perfect liberty to marry, only in the Lord." When I read this I asked myself, if this is marrying "only in the Lord," what would they consider as marrying "somewhat in the Devil"?

But such eccentricity is not general enough to concern us, and the church regards it as a certain "holy jumper" was regarded who came into one of my cottage prayer meetings in Plainfield. He had just fairly begun to hop and howl when an unconverted son of the household snarled out in loud disgust, "Set down, ye old jumpin' jack! You'll knock the lamp off the organ!"

One of these holy rollers whose exterior was very dirty got to shouting in meeting, "I've been washed whiter than snow!" A wag behind him called out, "Say, Pete, there's a spot behind your ear they didn't hit."

In a village church a G. A. R. memorial service was held at which the commander of the post marched his men up the aisle, two abreast, to take seats in the front pews. There was so large an attendance that chairs were brought which filled half the aisles. The old soldiers were to march out before the congregation broke up and the commander, wishing to get his men out in single file but forgetting how to give the order, astonished the congre-

gation with this acrobatic command, "Attention! Forward! Now double up and march endways right out through that door."

In rural neighborhoods often instead of being in charge of a professional director, funeral services will be conducted by a neighbor of the defunct. In one case that I know this office fell to a man who knew nothing about it. Many were present and he had a hard time to manage them. Finally he called out from the back door: "Hey, there! You fellows out there by the woodpile! If you think you be agoing to see these corpse, get a wiggle on you and come in here! We ain't goin' to keep 'im waiting all day."

Sometimes, however, the ludicrous will mix with the awful in ghastly manner. While a daughter was troubled greatly by the gasps of her dying mother I said, "But she isn't suffering now, she isn't conscious of pain." And the answer was, "Oh, no, she isn't conscientious now!"

The worst instance of this kind I know is where a man mortally hurt was reported dead, and the family scattered to the kitchen. A little later I saw that the man was not dead and went out and said to his son, "Your father isn't dead." "Oh, rats!" he answered in disgust, "and I had got it all telephoned that he was."

We heard strange things about that time. One man tried to tell us about his first wife's father and he got it his "wife's first father." One man thought the place where he worked was heaven, for, he said, "There is no night in heaven and there is precious little up here." One man had a boy working for him who got a blow which knocked him over and cut a gash in his head. "Darn it!" the man said later, when out of patience with the boy's folly, "They didn't turn you right side up quite quick enough." I met one man who pretended to a knowledge of phrenology. When he learned I was a student he said: "Yes, yes! I'd know you were a scholar by the location of your head."

I called on a woman past ninety and very talkative. Her sixty-five-year-old third husband sat near, hearing how his predecessors died in Christian peace. "I've had three husbands—praise the Lord—and they're all alive—oh, no! I mean they're all dead except *him*" (pointing at him), "he ain't. They died all peaceable." A little further on she took up her testimony, "I hain't been so good as I might, but, Lord, who could, in this wicked and adulterous generation!"

The Rev. Joseph Hamilton, of the Vermont Conference, was calling upon an invalid sister,

and had some difficulty in giving a spiritual turn to the conversation. At last he asked, "Do you love Jesus?"

The old lady was a little deaf. "Love cheese! Well, I should say I do, but my old man is too stingy to get me any."

Even the country graveyard has its cheerful spots. Merry imps wrote some of the old epitaphs. Some which we read of may be mythical. One which used to amuse me was:

"Here lie the bones  
Of Robert Trollup  
Who made these stones  
To roll up.  
And when death took  
His soul up,  
His body filled  
This hole up."

But I never believed in it. In the Vermont State Library I found this:

"Here under this sod and under these trees,  
Is buried the body of Solomon Pease,  
But under this sod lies only his pod,  
His soul is shelled out and gone up to God."

This, too, is one of those things which, not having seen, I grasp by faith. But among those which I have seen I copy this, from an old slate slab in the Center cemetery at Plainfield, Vermont:



“ABIAL PERKINS

Drowned Aug. 17, 1826.

13 yrs. old.

This blooming youth in health most fair  
To his uncle's mill-pond did reparaire,  
Undressed himself and so plunged in,  
But never did come out again.”

And from the Plainfield village cemetery I  
copy this:

“Five times five years I lived a virgin's life,  
Nine times five years I lived a virtuous wife,  
Wearied of this mortal life, I rest.”

Which is permissible, surely. But on subtracting the dates you find three years of her life unaccounted for—which is regrettable. Near this are the graves of a man and his wife. His gravestone says, “At Rest,” but hers, more belligerent, says, “We Shall Meet Again.” In Waterbury Center, Vermont, a man erected, at the request of his second wife, a monument to his first, on which appears the name followed by the other information, so that it reads, “Died on [such a date] by request of his second wife.” And a friend tells me that in Peacham, Vermont, is the grave of one Dodge who lived so as to earn this record:

“Here lies old Dodge who dodged all good  
And never dodged the evil.  
He tried in vain to dodge his death  
And couldn't dodge the devil.”

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Quaint and crazy such epitaphs may seem—however, I am willing to do by all gravestones as I would that they should do by me, which certainly is not to stand over them and criticize.

Even better than the graveyard, perhaps the richest of all sources of cheerful humor in the rural pastorate is a close acquaintance with the little tots. A boy in Sunday school said that Jesus went into the wilderness and *feasted* forty days, and another reciting the twenty-third psalm said, "Thy rocks and thy staff, they comfort me." A baby saint in my parish received the donation of a cotton dog. That night, using strict economy in prayer, he besought the Lord as follows, namely:

"Now I lay me down to sleep. Amen." His mother prompted him, "Oh, go on!"

"I pray thee, Lord, my soul to keep. Amen." Again urged he said:

"If I should die before I wake, Amen. I want to get done and see my dog."

The tiny grandson of a distinguished Vermonter has done his bit toward making a vivid interpretation of the Scriptures. With great animation he rendered this version: "Now Samuel, he lived in the temple, and his mother made him a coat of a lot of colors, and it was all dark night, and Samuel went to bed in his

crib, and all at once *he heard the Bogie man yell, 'Samuel, Samuel!'*”

I once asked a little girl if she went to school. “No,” she said. “I going next time. I don’t know anything yet.” Another little girl had to have the stethoscope used on her chest and she told us that the doctor came and “telephoned her nightie.” She saw me in my fur coat, patted it and said, “Nice kitty coat.” I baptized a little baby who sniffed up his nose as soon as he felt the water, shook his head, and using both his hands like paddles, scraped the drops away as fast as he could.

On the train I saw a little dimpled girl of four years putting her arms around her big brother’s neck, with her lips close as if to kiss him. Then with great glee in the hearing of all the car she cried, “Ho, ho, mamma! I *did* spit in his ear!”

Whose heart would not bubble over for joy of befriending these little lovable? Besides, they leave you in no doubt. If “Guggle-goo-goo!” is the opinion of a fat, laughing baby, he will not leave you in suspense; he will tell you so. If he thinks otherwise, he will kick and bawl blatantly when you try to take him. When babies get to maturity of four years there is still more tonic in their frankness. I was visiting a family of four beautiful chil-

dren. Just as I had formed my opinion which was loveliest, the lassie I had chosen, with the outspokenness which characterizes children and one other class of people, favored me with her opinion of me:

“My, but you’re homely!”

Turning to her younger sister, I remarked, very much humbled, “I guess Miriam doesn’t like me.”

“’Es, she ’ikes ’oo, but she don’t ’ike to ’ook at ’oo.”

“Why doesn’t she like to look at me?”

“It’s ’tause ’oo are so—so what she said ’oo was.”

Delectable delicacy! Then the pitiful little miss climbed on my knee and administered the comforts of religion:

“Did Jesus make ’oo?”

Now that put me in a bad box. I didn’t want to blame anybody—and I didn’t want to disturb a child’s theology. So I allowed that peradventure he did, I couldn’t remember.

“Zen ’oo not to blame, is ’oo, ’tause ’oo is so—what she said ’oo was?”

I denied all culpability, and promised to do better, but I fear me I have backslidden.

**PART II**  
**QUIZZING THE COUNTRY PASTOR**



## QUIZZING THE COUNTRY PASTOR

*/ Do you consider the long pastorate necessary to success in the rural church?*

Yes. The deepest, most abiding constructive work cannot be done without a long pull, under one leadership, toward one statesman-like policy which must cover many years of development. Flitting tenure is the curse of the pastorate, the schoolroom, the Legislature. "Never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" *because* their teachers must be "ever learning." When Asbury and his Knights of the Far Country galloped the glens and swam the rivers on horseback, the short pastorate may have suited the primitive conditions; but with a settled and intricate society, sending its roots deep and tangled, this cannot be so. Does a "big business" or a bank change its directors because it is beginning to have success under their leadership? The sooner any inefficient pastorate closes the better. But, granting the highest grade of efficiency, a long succession of short pastorates misses the deeper insight, the steady growth. By drawing more attention to the minister away from the worship of the Christian Church it may indeed



stimulate the interest of novelty. The cost is half a wasted pastorate for each shift. There are things necessary to the most thorough-going success which cannot possibly be learned by the most intimate pastor during his first two years in a parish. Rural confidence cannot be won on the wing.

I am convinced by my own experience. I found my church building ruinous, my people so discouraged that they almost refused to let me try to raise two hundred dollars for repairs on conditional pledges. They would not even buy a bell for the steeple though money had been donated for that purpose. The salary (very small and nearly one third paid by endowment) was never paid on time and a large annual deficit was covered only by taxing the stewards. The church membership was but one hundred and twenty-seven. Since that time the finances have been put on a business basis, the salary increased one hundred and fifty per cent, bills now paid monthly by check on the bank. Benevolences have increased more than one thousand per cent. Modern comforts have been put into the reconstructed parsonage, and the church edifice has been flanked by a stone-walled and tree-filled park. The church building has been reconstructed without and within at a cost of

much over six thousand dollars. (At the downfall of Germany the bell was ringing all day from our own steeple.) Though nearly seventy per cent of the membership which I found has been lost by death and removal, our net gain has been over twenty per cent, baptisms sometimes reaching thirty-five in a year, without special services. Meanwhile in a remote community called Adamant we have organized a church where one had never been, and encouraged it to construct for itself, without debt, a beautiful little chapel, where last year there were eighteen baptisms and fourteen accessions to membership. These successes are only the beginning of our dreams, and there is nothing significant in them save this one fact: I am the first pastor who ever remained more than three years. During my first three years I labored harder in my parish than my duties to the State of Vermont have since then permitted me to do, but every visible result was loss and retrogression until the traditional limit was overstayed. Then began success and courageous growth.

Shifting pastorates rot the morale of the ministry. The root-evil of the rural pastorate is restlessness, and a desire to be gone to advancement. Every minister who patiently teaches that advancement may be had with-

out removal is a prophet. Power and honor are in the man, not the place, and it always seemed to me an undignified thing for a successful man in any profession to knock about from pillar to post.

*2 Is there anything to offset the depletion of the rural church by the going of its young and others to the city?*

For four years the correspondence of the commissioner of agriculture for the State of Vermont was done in my home, and it showed that great numbers of people were inquiring for abandoned farms which they might buy. If the State could make available to home-seekers the exact information about salable farms, it might increase its rural tax revenues and reopen many rural schools. A small tide is turning back to the country in a way that may some time compensate for our losses. It is to be remembered that telephones, magazines, libraries, modern improvements, and, most of all perhaps, automobiles have made people contented to live in the country, and have made the great outer world easily accessible from what city folks call their "isolation."

The greater flow of folks is cityward, however, and the sooner we face the fact that so it is and so it will be, the better service we

shall give. Thus we help train that eighty per cent of the nation's leadership which comes from the country, along with so many who will never lead. With the folks who remain we can do the intensive and not the numerical task. Many a time a statistical success is the worst knock-out a country church can receive.

As for abandoned farms in the mountains, most of them are natural forest lands which have been abused by cultivation until they have taken their vengeance. They ought to be set out to trees. They should never have been inhabited by anything else.

*3 I have a little Baptist Church in a place where there are three other churches. My church is one of the strongest ones, but none of the others will unite with us and there are only six hundred people to be ministered to by all. What would you do in my place?*

Get out of it.

But if for some reason I felt it my duty to stay (for sometimes our own feelings are as compelling as the generalizations of those theorists who settle things from afar), I would make the financial sacrifice necessary to staying and, forgetting my rivals, I would devote myself to intensive teaching with the zeal and

contentment of the teacher in college who does not worry because he knows his class will always be small. I once saw Professor Charles D. Adams, of Dartmouth, teaching the *Œdipus* in a class of six, with great inspiration, wholly oblivious to all the buggy biologists who thronged another class in the same college.

*4/ Have you any pet way of solving the question of the several churches in the place where one is needed? What is your experience?*

The strongest will prevail, and this is as it should be. If among several weak churches one can be dominant with vitality, the ideal thing is that it should absorb the support once given to the others, while those other organizations die from the earth. Any federation which preserves them serves only to emphasize, advertise, and increase the temperamental differences of the members, and to drive them into clannishness. In the ordinary overchurched community I never had any respect for federation at all, until a tour of some sections like Center County, Pennsylvania, made me think that in extreme cases it might possibly be temporarily advisable. Still it is only a makeshift. It is better to go to the root at once and frankly. Let one of

the strongest preachers in that denomination which is strongest in any given community take the field prepared to stay. The problem will gradually solve itself without a word of proselyting.

The fact that the church which survives will still be denominational is an objection too foolish to answer. Better a recognized denomination manned by a preacher too large-minded to emphasize denominational differences than several denominations bound in one bundle where the differences are emphasized at every turn. If you give up all denominations and start new, you have simply started a new denomination out of incoherent elements.

In my own community I never encouraged talk of federation. There used to be four churches. Long ago the Baptist died, only one member being left (I don't know whether he is organized or not). Next the Universalist gave up, and presented their building for a town hall. This was before my arrival. The Congregational church and mine worked side by side for four years when it too could no longer continue. All these different elements now worship in our church, open their homes for prayer meetings, and seem to feel like our own original members regarding their church home. Many have since joined the

church. I received two sons of a Congregational minister at one communion by their father's consent and encouragement. We used the Congregational building during the reconstruction of our own, and it is now being bought for community purposes. The only test of this harmony came when a former Universalist minister, disgruntled for political reasons, announced services and advertised one of the leading lights of his denomination for the first number. They were able to hold only one morning service, but the experiment crowded our own church to the doors.

*5 Do you think that one church is sufficient for a country community?*

Usually, but by no means always. Many times both the social and religious life of a community are richer for having two churches. This doesn't necessarily mean lack of unity, any more than it would to have several classes in school. Whenever I have been pastor alongside another pastor, I have asked him to make one complete tour of the community with me, we together calling on all his people and all mine, and this has resulted in delightful relations and reciprocities. Organic union, except by natural evolution, sometimes gives less real unity than before. There may be economic



waste, of course. Those who pay the bills or serve at the sacrifice should worry about that.

Before our own church became the community church I was interested to note from whom came the frequent suggestions of federation. Never from members of either church. Never from interested attendants. Always from those who might feel some duty toward the church but rarely exercised it, and would prefer one well-filled church as the better excuse for their own absence, one well-paid institution as the means of lightening their own subscription.

It is customary to urge union in many cases where one church positively will not seat one fifth of the community to be served. The harvest is great, and here we are thinking not of gathering it, but of the success of the reaping church *as an institution*. This is the defect of our propaganda. If we were actually gathering that hill-flung harvest, we should now and then be glad of an extra barn. This doesn't mean that I want to see a community over-churched, simply that I don't lie awake nights to worry about it any more. Time and trend will take care of that. By that time we shall have talked so much that we shall give the credit of the reform to our agitation. But the latter was only a symptom.

*What do you do with your boys?*

Our aim is to grip strongly hold of the imagination and hero-worship that fill the heart of a boy and to turn him on these rud-  
ders to the high seas of God. "What do you do with boys?" Probably the question refers to boys as clansmen—how to organize the gang spirit. First we tried the Knights of King Arthur, then with better success we organized a "Forum Puerorum," in which we had readings, debates, mock trials, and Legislatures. Its activity was too purely mental. We next organized troops of Boy Scouts, and satisfied the passion which impersonates the ideals of all out of doors.

Our last camp was on a point of poplars jutting into a glassy lake among the peaked forest hills. We cut loads of hemlock boughs for beds, spread our blankets over them and slept in great white tents among the ever-green fragrances.

We had a mess-tent which at first was true to its name. Discipline, difficult but needful, soon came. Obedience was instant and unquestioning. We learned the value of that as soon as we tried to get twenty boys together at once. "Come, now!" was answered by "Well, just as soon as I get this dish washed, I'll——"

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“Drop that where you are and come *now!*” was the instant rejoinder, unnecessary thereafter. The boys learned to assemble for prayers or meals the instant the bugle blew. Two were appointed to serve in turn each day as cooks, two as waiters and two as dish washers. We sat along the rocks and mossy mounds while our rations were dealt us.

By fishing and picking blueberries the Scouts helped support the camp. Our games took us ranging the forests. One game was to hurl rocks at mimic men of wood until we had knocked down all those set up by the opposing patrol. The treasure-hunt game was especially popular. Two opposing patrols went to their tents out of sight while someone took the boat, crossed the lake and hid a coil of rope under an old stump, making a map of the shore and the location of the treasure. The map was hidden. Then one patrol was called forth at a time (while the other was busy indoors) and the patrol was victor which could find the map and by it take the boat, locate and bring back the treasure in the shortest time.

We had our swimming time (twenty minutes) and nobody went into the water at any other hour. If any were slow preparing, they lost that much from the fun. The lake was not

good for bathing; the bottom was rocky and deep. One boy got such a good start that I let him continue swimming his fifty yards for second-class test. I followed him close with the boat. At eighty yards I took him in. A scout already in the boat wanted to swim back. After twenty yards I heard him talking to himself: "Golly! Don't know's I can do this!" I backed the boat to him instantly. "Come in here right now!"—and he did.

I never shall forget how at sunset when the lake was so glassy that it mirrored the mountains the boys loved to turn the bugle first toward the great rocky cliffs of Niggerhead Mountain, then to a peaked forest hill across the lake. Two blasts on the bugle, and "Sweet and far from cliff and scar," six distinct echoes rolled, antiphonally pealing, and died among the hills. Then at night we sang songs and told stories beside our camp fire which was duplicated down the glassy waters.

Our camps and long hikes reveal the nature of the boy as nothing else. Strange and un-had wisdom is needed at every turn. One boy was so willing that others imposed their work upon him. One big boy was so slow that his day as cook made problems. One boy would not wash himself. "Go down to the boat and wash your face. Why haven't you done it before?"

"Why, I couldn't see where it was dirty."

Then we expounded that the whole was the sum of all the parts; if he diligently washed the general area, he would doubtless be rewarded by covering the particular smut.

One boy was touchy and peevish, and of course was picked on. They called him "Baboon," greatly to his disgust. I had taught the scouts a yell—nine "rahs" with "Boy Scouts!" at the end. One morning I had to cross the lake before the camp stirred. While over, I heard first one voice then another. The camp was waking. By and by I heard a loud chorus, "Rah, rah, rah! Rah, rah, rah!" and fully expecting the Scout yell I listened for the rest, and heard "Rah, rah, rah! Baboon!"

But the problems and difficulties of getting out with the boys are few compared with the values. The ructions are few compared with the good fellowship, harmony, and helpfulness. Incidentally, too, there is great value in the love which the parents give to any pastor who can lead their boys, teach and inspire them. The Boy Scout organization is not the only means of working with boys, but happens to be the best we have tried. Camps and hikes are very useful, but, of course, the daily work, the constant new attainment and the func-

tioning of Christian courtesy are the main benefits.

With the variations due to sex the Camp Fire Girls match the Boy Scouts. My sister, a Camp Fire Guardian, has many stories to tell of girls who have come through normal fun and self-expression to devout lives and church membership; from ideals of being chorus girls at theaters to that of being Red Cross nurses and missionaries.

When the question of what to do with the boys refers not to the gang but to the individual, it is much more fascinating. Be one of the boy's elect or you are out of the world so far as he is concerned. He lives in a dream world and has interests which usually are few and intense. Know and join him in the things he loves or be fossil. If you must guide him from those things, have a more fascinating substitute. I know a woman whom to this day I should hate to see, because she was bored when as a child I wanted her to read all the wonderful poems I was discovering. I know a man who likewise miserably perished because he would not look when I wanted to point out mountains on the moon.

The potter of boyhood works with the wheel of hobbies. Mine were astronomy, color, pictures, poetry, knighthood, and

“old unhappy far off things  
And battles long ago.”

For one of my schoolmates the heavenly robes were blue uniforms with brass buttons. The locomotive was the dream of another. Another boy hankered for the beasts of the field. Erstwhile at gloaming he sneaked around behind the barn and assassinated a cat. Next, in the moon haunted night, he hunted the fragrant skunk. His cudgel came down, and the creature was extinct. This put the boy in bad odor with his relatives, but in unshaken determination to be a mighty hunter before the Lord he rounded out the season with thirty-five woodchucks, four racoons, and one fox, the latter caught alive and tethered in the yard. Like Michael contending with the devil, he disputed with his brother, not about the body of Moses, but about the possession of a captive woodchuck in a barrel. Suddenly the tears and bawling of the younger boy turned to loud laughter. With a yell he tipped the barrel over and the woodchuck fled, waving his latter portions at the foe as he galloped away over the grass.

The comprehending minister can work his will with any boy to whom he will get close enough. The boy has an imaginative and imitative hero-worship which will idealize the



minister and whatever themes the latter can surround with haloes. Kenneth Graham in *The Golden Age* tells of a paddling boy seated in a hog's trough, which the insulted boy, when laughed at, declares is no hog's trough at all but the good ship Argo, out for the Golden fleece. I owe my ministry to my father's reading of Bible stories long ago. Those old heroes fired my imagination. It became my great ambition to wear a full beard, and I watched the looking glass for sprouts, because in the pictures did not Abraham have a cascade of whiskers? I hung by the hands from an apple tree, playing Judas Iscariot.

"What are all these pieces of tin?"

And I would answer: "Oh, those are thirty pieces of silver. Don't touch 'em!" I was Moses, and I pasted my paper angels on my shoe-box ark of the covenant. Once I crushed the "Thrice A Week World" into a heap and set fire to it on the top of the kitchen stove. I answered the paternal interference with, "Verily, verily, I say unto you I am offering up sacrifice to the most high God!" Father explained quite clearly that sacrifice was no longer required but that the house was.

My education was saved by other hero-worship. I had backslidden. Bob Fitzsimmons was my hero and I followed my schoolmates

about for pugilistic triumphs. I read worthless novels. Father then read me "Ivanhoe." I remember running hard in the road when my ankle turned and I fell in a cloud of dust. I was glad. Was not I Bois-Guilbert thrown by the thrust of Ivanhoe? English history and the Waverley Novels became my passion. Those chapter-head quotations sent me to Shakespeare. I discovered Burns and Scott's poems. I talked literature with everyone who would listen to me. I was sent to old ballads by such lines as

"My banes are buried in yon kirkyard  
Sae far ayont the sea,  
And it is but my blithesome ghais  
That's speaking now to thee."

So the vistas opened and my loves were fore-ordained. The imaginative, imitative hero-worship of a boy is the great central rotunda of his soul. From it the doors open in every direction and the vistas reach endlessly away. Somebody chooses and opens them. Why not you?

If you speak of pulpit ministry to the young, this must grip the primal emotions; be plain, direct, simple, and imaginative. In this it differs from ministry to the old only in that, if you are arid, the old will make respectful

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pretense of listening, while the boys will pay no attention to the windy blat. The chances are that the grown-up like best your sermons to the children.

By the imaginative quality I mean it must get its picture hung on the walls of home. I heard a memorable sermon to children on Lyndonville Camp Ground. Dr. Charles Roads was speaking of the evil spirits which get into the heart of a boy. On a big paper heart he pinned the picture of a bear and told about the boy who was "cross as a bear." Then he pinned up a pig and asked if when boys fed the pigs they ever saw them backing aside from the trough and saying, "After you, my sister!"

"No, they puts both feet in the trough!" exclaimed one little fellow.

"Surely, they do," the preacher said and told the evils of piggishness. "Now how can one get over being a pig?" The answer "By growing up to be a hog!" was admitted to be as apt as it was unexpected, and a more excellent way was shown. Other pictures were pinned up to show other evil spirits, among them, for the benefit of the girls, a peacock to picture vanity. Then the preacher showed how we could get rid of our devils. He pinned in the center of the heart a copy of Hofmann's

picture of the child Christ and the other pictures fell off the paper fast as they could fall, illustrating the text "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

There are two dangers in preaching special sermons to children. One is that you will "talk down" to them, which to the growing, manly boy is anathema; the other is that by having sermons especially for them you suggest that they are excused from all other preaching. The one great advantage of preaching to children is that if you really want the attention of the adult, you can get it in that way. The best method is to have the message such that no child can help listening and understanding, and then you have gripped the hearts of all.

As for sex-instruction of the young which is universally neglected in the homes, and which has in mind the preservation of personal purity, it is a delicate question. I do not know how to handle it, but have a few suggestions. One is that frankness should not become brutal intrusion. Voluntary confidence should be encouraged. It is certainly true that any sex attention wakens sex activity, hence to overdo is to defeat one's own purpose. The modesty and mystery of nature are not without wisdom. Surest of all, the one thing not

to do is to assist in the circulation of certain books which profess to tell everything the young should know, but really tell nothing which he doesn't. They waken intense sex interest without giving any real information or satisfying any question. It takes little such fertilizing to make curiosity grow like a weed. It is in rich soil. In any case, far beyond what the simple wakening of the sex impulse would have done, accompanied by a few kind and timely words, sexual things have tangled his attention and imagination to an extent from which he will not recover.

7 *What is the social life of the rural community?*

One April day a public "sugaring-off" was held in the woods at Plainfield, Vermont, and the event was photographed and written up by reporters for the Boston papers. The ignorance with which the report was written was too much for our risibility. Imagine our merriment when we read that "life in Plainfield was very democratic, the leaders in society moving freely and familiarly among the lower classes." Not even a rural imagination would be vivid enough to conjecture which were the "leaders" or who were "those lower in the social scale." Social life in the country is democratic, not because upper and lower

classes mingle freely (an idea ridiculous beyond laughter) but because there is no such thing as social class distinction in places where everybody knows (and talks about) his neighbor and his neighbor's business so intimately as in rural life.

If the inquiry relates to the social gatherings of the country community, let me describe some of these as I have known them in the Green Mountains. Each season brings its own. In the spring the farmers who make maple sugar invite their neighbors to come to the sugar house and eat sugar on snow while the process of boiling the syrup into sugar is being completed. This results in delightful open-air parties, wholly informal, with no program but conversation, fun, and an occasional snowball battle between the youngsters.

When Memorial Day renews the reminiscences of the sixties, the country band is called out to march with the few remaining "boys of the Old Brigade" carrying the old flag, and followed to the graves of their comrades by all the school children in town, the public schools always being prominent in the programs of the day. The whole town gets together, and where there is still an organized Army Post and Relief Corps there is often a public dinner. This day results in a social



concourse of great value. But how rapidly of late years have the changes come, the old soldiers going swiftly to their long home and the stalwart American Legion reminding us that we live in a new generation!

I think the rural patriotic audiences, such as gather in places like the G. A. R. Memorial Hall at North Calais, Vermont, are the best in the world before which to make a speech and to have a good time doing it. I was to make a speech at Woodbury, Vermont, during the Great War, when the chairman announced that after one more piece by the band we should have the pleasure of listening to the Hon., etc. Then the band struck up "Listen to the Mocking Bird."

Midsummer brings its Sunday-school picnics and other annual gatherings out in the hill-side forests. There one finds ice cream, lemonade, conversation, croquet, swings, games, love-making, politics, religion, all of innocent sort, the oldest inhabitant and the littlest tots being welcome.

Then comes the corn-roast. The night is heavy with dew, but the moon shines on the tall green standing corn. A great camp fire is built on the meadow. Its blaze makes the grass vivid with a strange and beautiful green, and when it has burned down enough to make



red embers each person puts a long-pointed stick into the end of a green ear of corn and roasts it brown (or more likely black) on the coals, afterward gnawing his hot feast off the cob like a squirrel. I never shall forget the satisfaction with which I, as a boy reading the *Waverley Novels*, stepped aside from the bonfire and won a sword contest from my challenging foe, using our corn roasting sticks for weapons.

The husking-bee used to be a favorite social custom. Pumpkin pie, apple pie, doughnuts, coffee, and cheese were the refreshments set forth by the hostess. The neighbors gathered in the lantern-lighted barn and husked out the ears which had been previously picked from the stooks. If a young man found a red ear among the yellow ones, tradition entitled him to kiss the girl of his choice. My father saved the red ears for seed till nearly all his corn was of that color, but he was wise enough not to have a husking-bee.

The kissing-game is a crop which grows without much cultivation. I am not invited any more, but in "the days of auld lang syne" I remember *seeing* the forfeits paid in Copenhagen, Drop the Handkerchief, Post Office, Needle's Eye, or anything else which allowed young people to yield to their natural impulses

under an excuse which saved their bashfulness. After joining the church on probation I once danced the "Virginia Reel" in blissful ignorance of the rules of the saints. An old lady gave me a Scotch blessing. A little later, her own daughter, president of the Epworth League, was the most prominent figure in a kissing party. To another elderly saint, "aiblins nae temptation," I "wispered 'i her lug" that I couldn't see wherein it was worse to hop to the music of "Gathering Peascods" or "Old Zip Coon" than to engage in promiscuous kissing games. With horrified wisdom she told me that the dance had "*evil tendencies*" but the kissing game was only "silly." Both are still common enough. But here ends this oscillation into osculation.

The country fair must never be forgotten among rural social events. James Hogg refused Sir Walter Scott's invitation to accompany him to the coronation of King George IV on the ground that this would necessitate his absence from the Selkirk fair; but I myself knew of a person who chose to attend the Woodstock fair in preference to a tour of Yellowstone Park; and one couple timed their marriage so as to make their wedding trip to Tunbridge fair. These fairs usually last three days, ending with horse races. There are exhibits of

everything which can be raised on a farm, produced or manufactured either by men or women, all under competition for prizes. The attendance is largely influenced by social considerations, for it is a place to meet friends from all over the county. Most rural communities have Granges, and the Grange fair is, on a smaller scale, as good as the county fair, and is better as a socializing agent, for it is confined to the community. The exhibits are educative and the rivalry helpful. I love the color-variety of a great table loaded with all kinds of fruits and vegetables.

Which table reminds us of the Harvest Dinner. The old-fashioned "boiled dinner" is served annually by the ladies of the church. Cabbage, turnip, beets, potatoes, carrots, squash, corned-beef, and salt pork are all put in one great kettle and boiled for dinner, the remaining portions being chopped into "red flannel hash" for supper, the beets giving the color, and the color giving the name. A little later in the season tradition requires a church "chicken-pie" dinner.

One night every year I hear a strange knock, and if I remember that it is Halloween, I am not surprised when I open the manse door to see nobody but a great grinning jack o'lantern, carved out of a green or yellow pumpkin and

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lit with a candle. Last Halloween the visitors were white-sheeted ghosts which mumbled inarticulately. My little niece in terror cried: "I want 'em outdoors! I want 'em outdoors!" I have been to Halloween parties where all kinds of witches and horrors were in masquerade processional. Once by moonlight in the barren loft of an old school building we were seated in a circle and told the story of Timothy, who was horribly *mur-r-rder-r-red*. Then we were told to pass from hand to hand around the circle the evidences of Timothy's mortality. A girl, shrinking with a scream from the touch of a cold, raw oyster, was told in guttural tones, "*Take Timothy's eye!*" Next it was, "*Take Timothy's hand!*"—a rubber glove tied full of cold water. Then as we filed past Timothy's coffin in another attic, the phantom of the departed belabored us each with a horsewhip. On Halloween the youngsters sometimes celebrate to the confusion of their elders. One farmer hunted all over his premises for his wagon, but it was nowhere to be found until somebody suggested that he look up to his house roof. There it was, with wheels astride the ridge-pole.

Thanksgiving as a social event is confined to the family circle, but Christmas is the crown of the year. In the family the little folks hang

up their stockings, but the public jubilation is around the great spruce tree, on Christmas Eve set up in the church and laden with presents to be distributed in the congregation on call of the owner's name, after the program of song and speaking, mostly by little folks. Santa Claus always comes on the stage in person, and nobody ever grows old enough not to delight in the joys and colors of the Christmas tree.

In the long winter evenings there are parties around at the homes where social games are played, too familiar to be described here. There is a whole library of books describing such games. There are refreshments of cake and coffee, or better yet, of apples—great McIntosh Reds, Northern Spies, Golden Russets—and richly buttered popped corn, piping hot, just off from the kitchen range. It is good to live in the country on terms of social, natural friendship with all the folks you know.

I do not mean that rural social life is always heavenly. I know of nothing that can be more terribly mangled by feuds, in the unfrequent event of something like a school or church row. But the storm settles back into sunshine, and it does not often blow.

As for organized social life in the country, there is not only the Grange, but in most

villages you can count more than a dozen distinct organizations. Sometimes there are hardly enough nights in the week for the demands of the country village. The business is greatly overdone, and the need for federation of rural churches is so small as to sink into insignificance when compared with the greater need for federating the social organizations of country life.

Telephone, automobile, moving picture, radio, and all the new influences are rapidly modifying the old-time social life, even of remote glens and mountains.

*What would you say to a young man who objects to the rural pastorate because he cannot grow in the country?*

I should not deny his inability to grow! The man who cannot grow in the country cannot grow anywhere. Vitality lies in the man, not in his environment. Be very sure of that. But go a step further and you will find that a rural environment is supremely favorable to intellectual growth. There are no city advantages whatever which can equal the long unbroken hours of study in which one is lord of his own moments, and intellectual monarch of all he surveys. His very privations are to his advantage. He misses the great city library,



the result is that he, being compelled to gather a good library of his own, loves those books better and lives with them more than he would with alien tomes. The topics of the hour are not thrust quite so insistently upon his attention; the result is a more perfect mental perspective. The great things of the ages loom in their true proportion; he is dominated by the inspiration of classic, noble things when he would otherwise be overridden by trivialities of the street and the news page. He does not so often hear the lectures of notable men; they are therefore much more impressive and memorable when he does hear them. That so many country preachers do not grow is not the fault of the country. Quiet Bethany and desert places apart were the haunts of Jesus; Paul went into Arabian solitude for three years, and before he was fit to lead Israel, Moses had to tend sheep for forty years in the lone mountains of Midian,

“Remembering there on mountains lone  
He might have ruled from Egypt’s throne.”

The glow of imperial thinking, as Adams calls it, the supreme contemplation, as Victor Hugo names it, are there. And with modern transportation and communication, the serene, well-poised countryman may magnetize to himself



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the best advantages of the city without the scatteration distractions which would bedevil his mental effort if he lived in it. The commonplace mind may find irksome the loss of urban stimulus, but the deep, masterly thinking of genius is done in tranquil loneliness, either of environment or circumstance. The busy hours of Van Dyke were not entirely in vain, but the one vision of his life which makes it worth while to other generations that he has lived was revealed when Providence stopped all hustle and sent him into the Hall of Dreams to receive the story of *The Other Wise Man*. The busy freedom of Bunyan may have been useful, but the world cares only for the solitude out of which came the immortal Pilgrim. Milton's life was not altogether wasted, perhaps, in the busy world of pamphleteering politics, but *Paradise Lost* was revealed in the dark and lonely quiet. Supreme, lonely concentration is the price of intellectual greatness, and no work in the world so nearly furnishes the right environment as the rural pastorate. Ten thousand live in that environment and never know the opportunity, but the few minds great enough to be worthy of it will send forth an influence like the Amazon River, whose current can be distinctly seen five hundred miles out to ocean.

Be very sure of this: If after looking into the facts any man really believes he cannot grow in the country, let him stay in the city. The country neither needs nor wants him.

*Is there not a lack of intellectual stimulus in the country?*

The man who depends on locality for his intellectual stimulus will not very much rob the world if his intellect is not stimulated.

If I may judge from a remark made to me after a lecture in New York city, intellectual stimulus is not always a characteristic of *urban* life: "Why, your speech was altogether *unusual*, you *interested* us!"

It is possible, however, for an intellectual person to be so constituted as not to be able to respond to the stimuli of the country. It is a matter of native taste and adaptation, and the stimuli are radically different. I have always believed that the intellectual stimuli of the country were far greater in power and variety than those of the city, but if a man is not fitted by nature to appreciate them; if he does not enjoy the forms, colors, and endless varieties of nature; if he cannot live close to human nature as he must in the country, he would better deposit his intellect in the city.

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*Do you believe in the institutional church for the country parish?*

Yes, but not the city organization loaded into a country community without adaptation to rural needs. Rural institutions differ from urban by inconspicuous, great essentials and only years of intimacy (mind, the word is not observation) can reveal what they should be. Then, if we do establish an institutional church in the country, we are not to imagine we are doing a new thing. An old parish house at Kittery, Maine, bears this inscription:

Benjamin Stevens, D.D.  
Community House  
Built in 1730  
Made possible by the  
Bequest of  
John S. Sewall, D.D.

---

Dr. Stevens Pastor  
from  
1751 to 1791

*What do you think of the methods of the present rural church movement?*

The division is impartial between the rattle of the wheels and the going of the cart. After loading my library with the lumber out of which they are built, I conclude that all our

works are begun in survey, continued in program, and ended in demonstration.

A survey we must have in every parish, but *by all means a secret one*. Let no man know he is being "surveyed" if you want his self-respecting friendship on such terms of equality as can avert his manly contempt. When your "community survey" is complete and ready to lay before the church, give out (to carefully selected helpers) only such facts as will induce laborers to the harvest, or are needed for a definite, immediate purpose. Then don't overload your survey with facts which are none of your business. This is a fault in every suggested survey I have seen. They all remind me of the Plainfield physician who thought to simplify his business by a new method of bookkeeping. When I asked him why he didn't come to play croquet any more he said, "I have to use all my spare time now on my new method of bookkeeping." There is on my table at this moment *A Method of Survey* which would ask not only the essential facts about the family, but the number of acres in the farm, the value per acre, the sources of income, the number of books, the number of rooms in the house, the age of each person, and *thirty-seven other questions*, many of them equally impertinent. Being rural from baby-

hood, I have had more merriment over this book than over Mark Twain, and it is as good a survey as I have yet seen. I can picture the folks being "surveyed"; one twinkling with the ludicrous, another patient and puzzled; another nettled by the impudence of it, and another—hale, emphatic old farmer, God bless him!—rising angrily to advise going to hell. I knew one "surveyor" who remarked, "I'm glad to see you do have a Bible." The response was, "Yes, and I know what is in it as well as you do." May your death be easy in any rural parish where you appear to poke around with your nose for personal facts to use as jack-screws for "uplifting." Wherefore, my brethren, if ye survey, be ye secret and simple therein; and if ye be so, ye will not think that this hobby of the day is a new thing. It hath been ever of old, and every true pastor has known his people (perhaps too well to need written notes about them) though he did not name his intimacy by the modern term.

Consider now the program. Its real constructiveness will depend on the expected length of the pastorate, but the first item on any new pastor's program is to become so intimate with his people that he will know their needs without resort to the artificial process of looking up the "survey," which, for

historical purposes, he may be wise enough to have. Until this intimacy is reached it is foolhardy to plan a comprehensive program, no matter what notes of fact one may have gathered. Little by little the dreams take form. The pastor has come to a place where the congregations are small, the youth and children neglected, the support miserably inadequate and tardily paid, the church building, always ill-adapted, now a ruin. Any other minister would think of this as impossible except for a temporary pastorate. But this man looks down along a Rhineland of magnificent castles in the air. He harvests the youth and little tots, he rallies the people to renew and beautify the house of God. Some will ask him if we cannot worship God as well in a poor and plain old house as in a new and beautiful one. He will steadfastly answer "No, and we of the cozy homes would be ashamed to do so if we could." I once had the bare old church of the Pilgrim Fathers thrown in my face. Forthwith I said: "The simple fact about the Pilgrim Fathers is that they gave to God the best they had. They did not build that bare house in the midst of carpeted homes filled with mahogany chairs and pianos." (For you will find such furniture close to many a rural church.) The pastor knows that the support

is inadequate because not half the community is enlisted. He soon sees the church on a good business basis, all bills paid, at least monthly, by a check on the bank. Thus far the program is fairly easy, but the pastor does not yet dare tell his people that down beyond these realizations he sees others yet more noble. Beside a beautiful park which he and his people have made in the midst of the village stands a new church, superseding the old (never mind those repairs which were made on the latter ten years ago), adapted to all modern purposes, possibly built of stone and surely exceedingly beautiful; for in a church building utility may *sometimes* be spared, but beauty *never*. I have ached more at the gawky architecture of churches in a hundred villages than at the profanity on the street. The latter is ephemeral; the former swears across the village green and into the blue sky every day. Beside this ivied church the pastor sees a parish house in which there is a gymnasium for boys (and girls at different hours), a cozy town library, an assembly and amusement hall with piano, ferns, radio, and victrola. In the basement, of easiest access by side door from the street, is the room where old men, or workmen at evening, sit by the fireplace and smoke, if they are unfortunate



enough to have the habit. But suppose all these improvements accomplished, they are only the machinery for working and no part of the real program of spiritual development. Little by little the church has become the dominant influence of all the countryside, the one home of all the people. Only a great man in a long pastorate can accomplish it, but for him a program of such magnitude is inevitable, dreamed and done.

Each man must form his own program out of his own heart and observation, but no man who hopes to succeed in a rural church must leave out the one thing which, though most important of all, is usually omitted by peddlers of rural advice. I mean *preaching*, strong, heart-moving preaching, eloquent in the true sense of the word, filled with intellect and thrilled by intimacy with God, so deep in sympathy with its hearers as human beings that it forgets whether they are farmers or senators. The preaching of Jowett or Morgan is not too good for the rural church. After reading the twaddle of the present one would almost think that a rural preacher should speak upon the relative values of manures and the buying of cattle, instead of swinging open the gates of the kingdom of God. If our advisers themselves knew more of rural life, they would know that the preacher who tries

their kindergarten methods among the country folks will soon appear like the fool he is advised to be. I wish I could quote directly the brilliant article of which Albert E. Roberts told me at Silver Bay. A country pastor went to a rural betterment meeting. One speaker was qualified to advise because he had been born in the country and got out of it as soon as possible; another had been invited because of the writings which he had sent from his city desk after one brief rural pastorate; and the third speaker founded his observations on an automobile tour he had once made through a farming district. After hearing the speeches the country pastor suddenly remembered that twice he had himself been to the city, so he wrote an article telling the city preacher how to run his church. There might be merchants in his congregation, so he should take a course in marketing and embody its results in helpful advices; there would be bankers in the pew, so he must tell them about investments and the taxation of intangibles; and there would be brokers, so no up-do-date city preacher should fail to *broke!* There would be undertakers, and he must be able to tell how to render a suitable corpse to a mourning congregation. Ludicrous as it was, it was not a bit more so than country preachers are finding its

reverse to be. You cannot fashion your program on external advice, for the advisers do not know the facts; or, more correctly, they do learn the facts, knowing nothing of the temperamental forces by which to value them.

One writer daubs a good book on country life with this quotation ("Independent" of August 26, 1909) referring to a country minister. "On a Sunday if it comes to a pinch between having his parishioners' hay get wet and his church get empty, why should he not put his manuscript in his pocket, take a hay fork in his hand and help his poorest parishioner secure his crop? This, at least, should be his comprehension of righteousness and duty." We will overlook the fact that the pastor may be trying, at least by example, to teach his people to keep the Ten Commandments. We will overlook the fact that he probably doesn't have a manuscript to put in his pocket, for most of the rural preachers who grip their congregations talk face to face and heart to heart. But no man indigenously acquainted with the country can overlook the fact that if a rural preacher just once should pitch hay in the fields on Sunday, his pastorate would be ended, and none would share the prejudice against him more deeply than the man for whom he pitched. When our advisers

write such asinine things how can they aid our "comprehension of righteousness and duty"?

The thought that a successful rural parish must be a demonstration point of visible accomplishments, usually relating to this temporal world, is another danger in the rural church movement. Such demonstration points might be of great use, but should be regarded as clinics rather than as normally functioning rural parishes. Just so soon as a parish consciously becomes a center of observation, its normal self-expression and development fail under the tremendous temptation to do the obvious and visibly successful things, which more often than not are least in importance. Without accomplishing any of those things which catch the eyes of the critic of rural life a pastor may sometimes be laying the foundations of life deep as those of Fletcher of Madeley; on the other hand, he may accomplish all these visible successes, yet wholly fail in the vital work of the pastorate. There is no such thing as the rural problem. You sit down to a problem, study, demonstrate and are done with it when you write "Q. E. D." But the force needed in the country church is like a mountain river which may indeed run from mill wheel to mill wheel, but which is constant and never done with its work.

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These criticisms will not blind us to the good in the rural church movement. Its messages are not advice to be taken *in toto*, but they are stores from which the right man will adapt and select. And I do not believe the stars exist more firmly than I believe that the only thing which need concern us in the least about any country church is to get the right man for its pastor. Given that, all other suggestions are superfluous; failing that, all else is in vain. The right man will know his own program before you can get your mouth open to tell him; the wrong man will make a joke of any program, the larger the plan, the bigger the joke.

*Do you believe in moving pictures as a substitute for the Sunday evening sermon?*

Each pastor must decide this for himself. Some films are highly educational and a few rare ones are spiritual, but you must reckon on the difficulty of obtaining such films. At a Theological Seminary Summer School a man who had once been a minister profaned the chapel with a picture which he was trying to sell as a substitute for preaching on Sunday evenings. It was a sex story with all the sordid situations minutely set forth. The fact that such inanity can be recommended to

a summer school of ministers must reveal some difficulty in getting good films. This one was commended because its moral teaching was good. That is like eating rotten apples so that you will know what fruit to avoid. In moving pictures it is the impression on the eye and the imagination during the process which is of supreme importance. The "moral outcome" apart from this is so little impressive as to be almost wholly negligible.

I once received a letter which said, "Will you come and lecture in our opera house and we will have moving pictures for the attraction?" I did not go. Yet it may be possible to attract people to church in that way and then win them over to what they didn't want. Without some evangelistic effort on the audience I should not care for pictures in the church. Nothing is gained by having a crowd in church if they are there only for secular purposes. There is no reason why a church should burden itself with what can be better done for the same crowd on some week night in the opera house. And I do not share the haste of some reformers to secularize our most sacred places.

Apart from their relation to the church, I think the movies fail at the two points where they are most thought to succeed. 1. They



are *unreal*. Witness the unnatural gasping and posing, the jumping-jack activities, the constant repetition of the same few faces to represent many characters; also the ludicrous, impossible blunders. When I saw a boy supposed to have been raised in our New England winters running on floating ice without knowing enough to remove his heavy fur coat, the tragic picture became comic. 2. They are *uninteresting*. I read a book and I can see the landscape in all its color and the action as it is presented by the author. I go to the theater and I see a quivering, dull-gray rapid monotony which makes the moonlight seem blessed after an hour and a half of incarceration. But this is a gratuitous personal opinion.

*How much publicity should a rural pastor give to his program?*

Publicity is peril. A far-seeing statesman-like program is necessary, visioning down the vistas. But if God has given a man a revelation of great things to accomplish—and the chances are nine out of ten that his people are not ready to understand him—let him dwell “in the secret place of the Most High.”

If step by step, with only those in his confidence who are necessary to its performance, the pastor leads his church to some new



achievement, he keeps it vital with constant refreshment. If he begins by telling all his dreams, he challenges misunderstanding, then opposition, then acceptance, then, since the whole thing is mapped, the drudgery of performance. It might have been the inspiration of adventure.

Of course, where an aim is immediate, everyone who is expected to cooperate should be taken into full confidence, but ordinarily I think of my program as I do my skeleton. I am glad I have one to keep me in shape, but I do not use it for demonstration purposes. Let the program appear afterward, if at all, fat with the flesh of achievement.

Not because it is inconvenient to make those minor changes which are always necessary in any living program, but for psychological reasons a long-time plan should not be too blatant. One of the great inventors of the day (the most successful psychologist of my acquaintance) was hearing a less successful inventor tell his initial plans. "Now I see," he answered, "why you fail to finish anything. When you tell your idea before its last perfection, you give it away; it is not yours and will not grow in you any more. Shut it up in your own consciousness and it will grow like a weed."

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*Do you take any means to distribute literature among your people?*

Yes, but not too frequently, and always with some effort to make it become familiar and precious. For example, wishing Fosdick's book, *The Meaning of Prayer*, to be in the hands of my people, I announced that it would be the basis of ten prayer meetings, and I asked them to buy and discuss it with me for ten weeks. This made it a treasure in each family. Wishing to teach my people that tithing was scriptural and the lowest proportion of giving which a self-respecting Christian could adopt, I bought one hundred copies of *The Victory of Mary Christopher*. Then I told my people that a great joy-giving truth which I had preached and wanted them to practice with me was taught in a heart-touching story, and I would make each family a present of the book, if they would first faithfully promise me to read it. This they did with great effect. In every parish the standard paper of the church should be urged into every home.

*Isn't it a sacrifice of the pleasures of home life for a woman to go to a country manse?*

No, indeed. The rush and interruptions of work, largely for trivial causes, make home life in the city parsonage much more difficult

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than in the quiet country. I cannot imagine a more ideal selection for a real home than a rural parsonage. My statement comes not only from long experience in a rural manse, but from as many years of very intimate acquaintance with the parsonages of certain very successful city pastors. It is the latter who give up the joys of home, their life is so overrun by the parish.

*Would the country minister be more free for his work if unmarried?*

No. I know a woman of good mind who objects to an unmarried priesthood that, since nearly all troubles in the world are the difficulties folks have in getting along with each other, in one way or another, a priest who has no such problems in the home cannot help the solution of such problems in the world. This might be interpreted with a mischievous twinkle in the eye, but if it has any force anywhere, it is in the rural life where one is close to elemental human nature.

Besides, the single young pastor is a shining mark, and we read, "God save the mark!"

*How can the "God-forsaken" borders be evangelized, if most of the inhabitants persistently fail to respond to all appeals which seek to interest them in "the Church at the center"?*

By gathering up an armful of good old Gospel song books and going out to the old red school house and holding meetings. Few school directors would dare refuse permission, and few homes could resist the attraction of their real community center, the school house, be it old or new. Regular Sunday afternoon meetings could be held in several districts at once if a pastor would encourage a few leaders from his church to help him, laymen taking charge in one place when the pastor was visiting another. These would not need to be formal preaching services, and once in three or four weeks at most the pastor could lead in person at each schoolhouse on this lay-pastoral circuit. I know of no meeting equal to an old-fashioned schoolhouse meeting on a winter evening. The Rev. Anthon T. Gesner, of Berkeley Divinity School, has a little Victrola and some choice sacred records which he got just for the purpose of assisting just such meetings as these. If you get into a schoolhouse, you probably get the child who attends there, and that gets the parent too. Let the services be simple but full of song and feeling.

*What can be done with the rural mid-week prayer meeting?*

Early in my ministry I rebuked the Sunday-

morning assembly of the saints for not attending prayer meeting in copious aggregations. "If it were the funeral of your father, would you not be there? Well, that proves that you could attend; and if you can, you ought." After one of these pastoral outbreaks there was a tearful midweek meeting, in which the attendants seemed to feel that the value of their presence was not appreciated by a pastor who was looking only for a large number. The meeting had two effects. Raging with inward indignation, I bought an old house on my father's farm overlooking the main range of the Green Mountains, and decided to be out of the ministry as soon as possible. But as soon as I had a place to which to go I was not in such a hurry to quit. Cooling off, I next enjoyed the reaction which has never left me. Never again would I get excited about the midweek service. Never again would I consider it the "thermometer of the church" or the measure of faith. To me henceforth it should be an elective, to use the language of the schools, ardently sought and needed by some temperaments, but not therefore a standard by which to judge others. Never again would I mourn or care that only thirty attended out of a membership of one hundred and fifty. The only thing which should henceforth con-

cern me was the real presence of God and the value of the program among the few who came, or the many, be it as it would. On that basis of intensive service the meetings have been more successful, better attended.

Sometimes they are made meetings of careful study with a textbook. We have used the several Fosdick books, like *The Meaning of Prayer*, discussing one chapter a week, sometimes with personal assignments, sometimes also reading the prayers therein as a ritual in unison, or one by one. We spent a whole summer studying the parables of Jesus using three texts: *Studies in the Parables of Jesus*, by Luccock; *The Teachings of Jesus*, Hubbard; and *The Parables of Our Saviour*, by Taylor.

Sometimes we have taken some book of the Bible by course, assigning to individuals for presentation at the next meeting the portions to be covered during the week, so that each attendant had some part definitely prepared. Sometimes we have announced one Old Testament character after another in series as themes for our discussion.

Sometimes I send announcements of themes by mail, accompanied by invitation. I never do this regularly or it would lose its force by becoming the expected thing. Here is one of the notices which I sent, covering the month of October:

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### PRAYER MEETING TOPICS FOR OCTOBER

Sent by your pastor

OCTOBER 6. *Endless Differences.* References: Matt. 25. 31-46.

Suggestions for testimony:

Does the fear of hell move the world to-day as much as it ought?

How has Christ made you different from what you were? from what you would have been now if you never had known him?

Try to describe Plainfield as it would have been to-night if it had never heard of Christ.

What great differences has the gospel made in the history of the world? in its literature?

Does the thought of heaven really make a difference in the comfort of your daily task?

OCTOBER 13. *Those Whom God Has Answered.* Examples of unmistakable manifestation of God will be given both from the Bible and from life.

OCTOBER 20. *Editing the Plainfield Herald.* Write out and read at this meeting some religious thought, story, experience, or item, in prose or rhyme; some advertising of our departments of church work; or anything else that would be helpful if put in a religious paper published for our community by our church. This will be the whole program of the meeting.



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OCTOBER 27. *Studies in Personal Work.* Help for those to whom soul winning by personal interview does not come natural or easy. *Bring Bibles* to the meeting. The objections likely to be made by those whom we seek to win will be answered, out of the Scriptures.

*Come to Every Meeting if by Any Effort it is Possible. I Want You Very Much. Pray for Each Meeting.*

Some years ago I was at a meeting at Weirs on Lake Winnepesaukee and heard Dr. M. S. Kaufman give the following list of questions which I have used with fine effect in meetings, stating the questions fully, but taking great care not to answer them. I have prefaced them by two brief texts.

“As we forgive our debtors.”

“God be merciful to me a sinner.”

1. Is a forgiven sinner treated by God as if he had never sinned?
2. Is the forgiven sinner as good as if he had never sinned?
3. Do sins, once forgiven, rise to condemn a forgiven man if he afterward sins?
4. Will the sins we have done be effaced from our memories in eternity?
5. Must we forgive those who wrong us whether they ask it or not?
6. To which is the greater benefit—forgiver or forgiven?
7. Are we required to *forget* as well as forgive?

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At the close of one service I announced: "The subject of our next meeting will be 'Am I my Brother's Keeper?'" Then I proceeded to distribute by name among those present the following questions to be answered at the next meeting:

1. Should one have any concern over his neighbor's conduct when moral or religious issues are not involved?

2. Should one try to influence his neighbor's conduct in matters where his own is at fault, known or unknown?

3. Should we study to find particulars in which we can guide the action of others, or concern ourselves only with those which circumstances bring to our attention?

4. If one can stop an evil at the cost of friendship and future influence, is the price too great?

5. If you feel called to interfere with evil-doing and fail to do it, what is the result upon yourself?

6. How far is it right to break the laws of social etiquette in the interests of religious conduct?

7. Should solicitude for the conduct of others relate only to matters of admitted right and wrong or also to things which are matters of opinion?

8. If we cannot be faultless in both the two points of minding our own business and of exercising our full powers of caring for others, which way should we lean?

9. Can a Christian deal just as frankly with the conduct of ungodly persons as with that of other Christians?

10. Is frankness better than indirect influence?

Often I ask laymen to lead the meetings. Special music is a great help, and is usually to be had for the asking. Evenings spent studying the stories of the great hymns, or vitalizing them by our own experiences, are full of inspiration. For instance, in our Annual Conference of 1906 Bishop John W. Hamilton was presiding at Morrisville, Vermont. The news came that San Francisco had fallen by earthquake and was burning, the fire raging near the bishop's home. One morning the bishop told us that he had no way of knowing that his family had not all perished—his library collected through forty years at a cost of \$10,000 gone, but—"Last night, brothers, I settled all that on my knees before God." Down on the center aisle sat Thomas C. Iliff, white-haired apostle of the Rocky Mountains. Shaking his white mane back upon his shoulders and looking up toward the heavens, he sang:

“Other refuge have I none;  
Hangs my helpless soul on thee:  
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,  
Still support and comfort me:  
All my trust on thee is stayed,  
All my help from thee I bring;  
Cover my defenseless head  
With the shadow of thy wing.”

For ever afterward that song was to have a new sanctity in my memory. Let each bring to some midweek service the songs which have been sanctified by his sorrows or his joys.

Sometimes when a meeting is thrown open “for testimony” it is well to ask someone by name to lead off, and to call upon someone else as he closes, who will likewise pass on the call to another till all have spoken. Sometimes I have had the discussion in the form of a question-box, assigning or answering the questions as I took them out.

The midweek service is devotional. It is for heart-hungry folks who want to get near to God. This should never be forgotten. It is the spirit which should prevail, whatever the theme. Sometimes in a group of young people led by one of their own age, I am asked, evidently as the easy way out, to “lead in prayer.” Often I step out and face the group asking them what ones are willing to help me.

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As the hands come up, I ask what things we ought to pray for in the meeting, and as suggestions are made I ask those who have raised their hands to pray, one for one thing, another for another. Sometimes where they were especially inexperienced or uncertain I have asked them all to rise, and I have led them in prayers which they would all repeat after me, sentence by sentence in unison. Sometimes we have used prayers out of the communion ritual; sometimes we have had our whole "season of prayer," just singing softly and with bowed heads those hymns which are also prayers like,

"More love to thee, O Christ,  
More love to thee!"

Meetings largely of prayer and song, especially meetings devoted to prayer for special objects or persons, are rich in blessing.

*Would you advise a young man who wishes to become a rural pastor but who knows only the city life to take a course in some agricultural school?*

By no means. It is a much advertised supererogation. You would spend two or three years studying scientific agriculture which as

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yet few farmers either know or apply; but in that time you could hardly fit yourself to teach him in his own lifelong work. If you could, he would not welcome city-bred youthful instruction. Agricultural Extension courses were brought to the town hall in Plainfield, Vermont. An old farmer, laughing with infinite amusement, said on the street corner: "There's a young fellow up at the hall trying to tell how to raise potatoes. Isn't more than thirty years old. I've raised potatoes all my life! Ho, ho, ho!"

What you really want is the rural point of view, the at-homeness with everything which concerns farm life as you will encounter it, rather than as it theoretically ought to be as a scientific stunt. Your great need will be at the very point where the agricultural schools are themselves at their weakest. Go out on some farm in the spring before planting time and stay until harvest. Select some locality where no false pride will follow you, and hire out. Trusty farm help is now hard to find and you will easily get a job. Live intimately in the farmer's family, work for him with your hands, earn his money, let him teach you, don't try to "uplift" him, and in one season you will gain besides your wages more than schools can give you in ten years. You will

have some hardships, but they will teach you the very things you ought to know at first hand.

Your purpose with the farmers of your parish will be sympathetic and spiritual. You are not to teach farmers how to farm any more than to teach the physician how to physic. The more you can get the farmer to teach you the better he will love you; only you must go to the community with enough of the farm point of view to avoid city greennesses. They joke at country greenhorns, but our summer visitors from the city still ask us: (1) If the way to unharness a horse is not to unbuckle all the buckles. (2) If it wouldn't be better to tap the maple sugar trees in October so as not to plod in the snow to gather the sap; and (3) if the farmers do not make a mistake in cutting the hay in July instead of in the last of September by which time it presumably would have grown much taller, thus affording a much greater body of fodder. These yarns are not fiction.

So far as formal schooling is concerned, our one great need is a first-class theological seminary with the best instruction the world can furnish, but located far out in the open country where every ideal and point of contact is strictly rural.



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*Are Hebrew and Greek of any use in the country ministry?*

They are not of very much direct use, any more than they are in the city. I do not know Hebrew, yet have found explanations from the Greek text occasionally very effective; but we should never forget that Hebrew and Greek are for the preparation of the minister rather than for quotation in the pulpit. The sooner we realize this principle in all our studies the more effective we shall be. In your week of study always give the few hours to the direct preparation for next Sunday's sermon and the many days to those studies which deepen and widen the mind without direct reference to any particular sermon. Make this a habit. You will not preach quite so well at first, but in a few years, half sick and with no direct preparation at all, you will preach better than you would on the same day with a week of study on one sermon, had you followed the other method. Your mental power will soon rush down on the congregation like Niagara where on the other plan it would only squirt and whiz around.

I am afraid, however, that underlying this particular question is another which you have not ventured to ask, regarding the intellect or education of the country congregation. If

anyone opines that it is below that of the city, he has revelations ahead of him. There is an old saying not wide of the mark: "When you go to the city pulpit wear your best clothes; when to the country, take your best sermon."

*If the country parish is so immense, including its neglected borders, how is it possible for one pastor to give it sufficient care?*

This question has usually followed the giving of facts regarding the extent of the average rural parish. Many rural parishes which are not in the least conspicuous among others for their size have a hundred miles of road and a thousand people to care for. Every church should take its share of the adjacent territory which falls pastorless between parishes. My own, an average rural parish for the Vermont Conference, has two churches seven and one half miles apart. In the field of only one of these churches there are, by measure, eighty-one miles of road and more than twelve hundred people to whom no other church could minister.

This pastoral work cannot be done by any pastor alone. A full year would hardly suffice to make a single circuit of the parish and of the outlying pastures which nobody claims. The only way possible to herd these sheep is,

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after all, the only way desirable. Let the pastor cover the ground often as he can, but let consecrated laymen also visit in the name of the church, going two by two, each pair along a separate chosen road. Let there be a definite purpose in each visit. When all the territory has thus been visited, let the visitors exchange roads and go again, encouraging those who responded to the invitation to keep on, and reinviting those who did not hearken. Thus the unshepherded people will be visited again and again by different members of the church until they will really believe the church cares for them. When that takes place the worst is past. In exchanging routes, of course no one must forget to encourage in some way the person who responds to his own particular urging, though from a route which he has just resigned to another. Since any one route will not be too long, it will certainly not put too much visiting upon any one layman. This answers the objection that it requires too much of a busy man's time. Nor will exchanging roads greatly multiply the work of any one person, though it does bring a total of so many members out over each road that the people at length are convinced that the church means business. It enlists the energies of all the church and means great continuous revival.

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It leaves the pastor free (aside from directing the whole work and making one tour of the whole parish—all he will find possible in a year) to follow up with definite help and precision of aim the special cases which he finds, or which are reported to him by his visitors. "Pastoral work" will no longer be a lackadaisical, gossipy going from house to house among the few who ought least to need it, and who ought most to help those that do need it. The one mighty agent of God's church is pastoral work of a godly, vital, purposeful kind, but I believe with all my heart that a great part of the so-called pastoral work is worse than wasted time. If pastors would "come alive," quit the fol-de-rol and the folly and consider themselves each the God-sent evangelist to every man who has no other, would not the work of the week be Herculean?

It is vain to object that this lay pastoral visiting is a shirking onto laymen of the duties of the pastor. In no way is this a substitute for the pastor's work or intended to give him leisure; it is only to make possible his covering a larger field, hitherto neglected. The oversight of so many lay-pastoral tours will greatly increase, not diminish, his work. But the field will be covered in a way to vitalize the church which does it. It is one more step

toward the church's consciousness of itself as the reaper, not as the field.

*Do you seek to bring men to definite conversion mostly by special evangelistic services or otherwise?*

Often by special effort, but rarely by special services. It is very difficult to get the unconverted to attend "revival meetings" in rural churches as they used to do when such methods were more in vogue. This is not at all unfortunate. The usual services of the church are good opportunities for "bringing in the sheaves" and for giving testimony to saving faith. But the ingathering of souls goes on by private interview and prayer during the week. Sometimes this will result in a demand for special services, but in such a case the way for them is prepared.

In the little country church where I was a boy my student-pastor asked me on the strength of Matt. 18. 19 to pray for the conversion of a man past fifty years of age, openly a sinner who never attended church. I agreed with him to do so, and announced to my father's family that within a year Jim W—— would be converted. They laughed at me. But soon Jim began to come to church. Then he began to talk about what we *ought* to do.

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After a little this became "what we *are commanded* to do." Then one day in haying he threw down his scythe and told me: "I'll fight it just as long as I can—but it has got to come! *It has got to come!*" Within a month it came. He leaped to his feet in the little Sunday-night meeting and declared his surrender. He kept the faith to the finish. He could not resist the prayers which claimed the promise.

Prayerful, earnest seeking of souls cannot well be resisted, whether it is the shepherding of little children innocent of evil or of hardened sinners. There is always power to save. There may be special meetings. There may not. But where there is failure it is because people do not care. They do not pray for folks as if they loved them. They do not act as if they really think it makes a great difference. They do not seek to win them one by one during the week. It is hard to resist the influence of a heart really aching to win into the heavenly road a friend whom it loves. And deception is impossible.

*Do you stay in a rural parish from a missionary intention or have you other reasons for preferring it to the city?*

I am not a missionary in the country, it is my home. My objections to taking a city



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parish are exactly the same as those which the city-bound graduates allege against the country.

1. *The city is too remote from the center of real advantages.* True, it has libraries, lectures, operas, trading facilities, etc. There is some advantage in these things. We of the country run into the city to enjoy them occasionally, ourselves. Most of them we can in some measure have in our own rural regions. But a world full of them could never equal the privilege of living close to the glories of nature in the country. The finest art gallery is a small thing to compare with a grove of maples in autumn color. The privilege of hearing Tetrizzini is negligible when compared with wild song birds in the rural bushes. A theatrical of any quality is dull compared with a moonrise on mountains of snow. There is so much to inspire thought and move emotion in the country scenes which God made for the natural dwelling place of man that any normal man who has to leave them for the city must do it with the distinct feeling of leaving the larger life for the smaller. He may go at the call of duty, but at a supreme loss of privilege and advantage. I am not being playful; I am telling you my profoundest convictions. Of course God is merciful, and spares the feel-



ings of those who must become city folk by letting them think they have the best of it. Their hearts would break if they really knew how much to be pitied they are, how much glory and joy they have left behind them at the center of things in God's open country.

2. *The city is too lonely and lacking in social privileges.* More folks to the acre? Yes. More social events? Of course. That is a part of the reason why social privilege is lacking. I am so social, I love people so much that I could not be happy in the city. Out here in the country I know all my neighbors and we have leisure to be friendly. Very naturally intimacy goes to degrees which can never be reached in a more numerous and highly organized society—if the latter expression is not a contradiction in terms. Much of our modern organization is the everlasting damnation of heart-to-heart sociability. We are rushing so fast and doing so much that there is no time to be friendly. One side of this statement I write out of my own highly social rural experience; the other out of the testified loneliness of my city friends whose sole business is social work.

3. My third objection to living in the city is that the *city has too little opportunity for contact with great minds and real leadership.* The

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reason is perfectly obvious. The city is the center of "news" and of "activities." It is the place where most of the men and women are to be found who are "in the public eye" and who are shaping the "events of the day." Granted. But most of these events which fill the newspapers are minor and ephemeral, and most of the public characters popularly supposed to be leaders are distinctly not more than third-rate beings blown into flitting prominence. Still their publicity gives them a seeming importance and distracts attention from the really great minds of the ages, which we of the more undisturbed country places, remote from so much buzzing of insect folks, have a real opportunity to study and to follow. We may not profit by it, but the opportunity is richer and the perspective better. In the Green Mountains I can read Emerson undistracted by the last fool who made a speech on the Common.

4. As a minister I could not afford to go to the city because the latter so lacks *opportunity for professional advancement*. Of course one could do successful work in the city, probably more easily than in the country; but if one does so, it must usually be "for the joy of the working." The city is so large and strident and most parishes, even large ones, are so

insignificant as centers of influence that city ministers usually sink into comparative oblivion along with multitudes of their kind. But let a man do a successful work as a country pastor and he at once comes into prominence in his profession; and if he does not consent to be pushed into urban obscurity, he has a career before him. It is not yet common enough for men of the greatest gifts to devote themselves to the rural ministry so that a success in the country pastorate could be other than conspicuous in the profession.

So among many other reasons, I give as objections to the city pastorate the very same ones which it is usual to allege against the country: (1) The city is too remote from the center of real advantages. (2) It is too lonely and lacking in society. (3) It has too little opportunity for contact with great and real leadership. (4) It has too little opportunity for professional success. I offer these in all sincerity after lifelong intimacy with rural life. My contact with city life has not been so close, though a few of the cities with which I am personally familiar are Montpelier, Burlington, Dover, Portland, Boston, New York, Washington, Chicago, Saint Paul, Saint Louis, Kansas City, Denver, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Riverside, Des Moines,

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Funchal, Granada, Nice, Genoa, Rome, Florence, Venice, Naples, Athens, Constantinople, Beirut, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Cairo—But catalogs sound like Walt Whitman. Let us quit.

*How can it be made financially possible for a man of real promise to stay in the rural pastorate?*

It does not have to be "made possible"; it is already so. There is condescension in such a question. It has the tone of the old gent who asks, "Young man, can you support my daughter in the style to which she is accustomed?" I know that the rural salary is a point of real difficulty from which many ministers turn aside, but let us be frank about it. We know perfectly well that a man who wishes to invest his life in the country can do so and receive a comfortable, though not a luxurious support. Of course rural charges can be indicated upon which a minister's family could not be supported, but these are far from representative. Many rural parishes which are more nearly representative could be named, the present salary of which is inadequate. But the present salary in most cases is no indication of the salary which would be paid for a minister of real power whose tenure was not too brief.

The feeling that a rural parish cannot afford a man of first-rate powers has not been wholly unfortunate, for it has diverted many undesirable pastorates from the country church. Still, it is an error to say that our most eminent ministers could not live upon a rural salary. They could. If they do not *choose* to do so, let the fact be admitted upon that ground; that is another thing. There are luxuries to which they now are accustomed which might have to be sacrificed—that is not the point. The pioneer history of any church or any part of the foreign missionary field has stories of sacrifice a thousand times greater than would be required to be pastor of a rural church even below the average in salary, if we are speaking merely of temporal things. Some say they are not troubled for *themselves* but for their children, who must have school and college privileges. Perhaps they can have these privileges even though the parent is a rural pastor; but if not, the case is not without precedent that a part of a preacher's call to sacrifice should be that his family should share in the sacrifice. The objection boiled down is, "God knows I realize the importance of the rural church, and I should like nothing better than to give my very heart's blood for it, but, of course, it is impossible, for that

would be inconvenient." Which having said the speaker dodges behind a little child for whom at least he might have trusted God. Of course this is putting the case bluntly and appealing to the heroic, whereas it is more timely to appeal with the financially attractive. The rural church will be little benefited by any to whom its appeal is in that golden tone. I am not saying that any man should take the course indicated above. I am only desiring that if he does not choose to do so, he shall say *that*, and not say that he does not because he cannot.

This is where the case should be left. As an incidental matter, however, neither of sequence or consequence, I want to affirm that any man who has sufficient mental ability to be a desirable rural pastor, and who makes a rural parish his home which he loves rather than uses as a station in transit, will be adequately supported in the average strictly rural charge. Neither would he have to hurt his dignity by supplementing his own salary like Paul. Lack of incentive and lack of organization, not lack of means or will, have been the causes of poor rural support. A yearly canvass of the constituency, complete and followed up in a businesslike way, will bring an adequate result for an adequate minister.



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(Tithing would bring an overflow of resources.)

Many churches are now realizing that they must be not only individually but collectively honest. We rarely report a deficit on the pastor's claim in the Vermont Conference now, though the Rev. L. Olin Sherburne, in investigations for the Conference Board of Stewards, found that in our history we had suffered \$284,000 of deficiencies in salaries of ministers, taking the figures as those salaries were estimated and fixed by the local churches themselves.

If this organization does not quite measure up, it can be supplemented. I know a church of less than thirty members in the open country whose Ladies' Aid makes more than \$300 a year. I know another which receives \$500 a year from well-to-do business men in the city who take pride in the little home church. This opportunity is not in the least unusual. All country communities have sent out men who are making money elsewhere. These are usually the kind of men who will not invest in a useless outfit, but will take pride in fostering a good one for the sake of the old home town where mother sleeps under the green grass. The one-room rural Meadowbrook school in Castleton, Vermont, received \$500 this last



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fall from a former pupil whom the teacher was alert enough to approach with her plans of improvement.

I was once told that it was not fair to press home the claims of the rural ministry to the point of sacrifice because I did other things of public nature which gave me advantage and remuneration. I replied that every advantage I had gained came because I had stayed in the rural ministry in one place. I am personally convinced of the temporal advantage of the rural pastorate. When I learned it, I was surprised. Now I am surprised that I ever thought otherwise.

The State of Vermont pays teachers in one-room rural schools an addition to their local salaries which is proportioned to the excellence of their qualifications. This is worth study as a rural home-missionary suggestion to the great church.

The one right way, the easy way, the way of glorious overflow, the only desirable way is scriptural, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse."

*What can be given to young people to do so that they can feel that they are really accomplishing something for their church?*

This question recurred so often that I sub-

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mitted it to the best organizer of young people whom I knew, and his swiftly summarized answer is this:

“Leading meetings, furnishing programs, making posters, secretarial work, writing post-cards, meeting younger groups, personal work, ushering, playing instrument in orchestra, calling on shut-ins, assisting in financial canvasses, writing notices for papers, going on deputation work, decorating the church, repairing rooms in church, cleaning rooms, taking part in pageants and plays, running stereopticon,” etc.

The question was separately submitted to several young people who are efficient workers. Many of the points above mentioned were covered in the answers. These also were emphasized: Seeking to interest others in the church individually and as friends so that they will feel that they personally are wanted; putting embarrassed strangers at ease through social fellowship; substitute teaching in the Sunday school—a duty which often results in training a permanent teacher; putting on dramas with sale of fancy articles between acts; visiting the sick; sending cards to the absent; seeking the drifted who have lost interest; determining upon constant personal attendance upon all services of the church.

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One young person makes a plea for each class to have representation on the Sunday School Board in the person of a pupil elected by the class. I found also that the following direct quotations were significant:

“The lack of cooperation is the weak point, I think, between the young and the old. If the Ladies’ Aid and others only realized that by giving us opportunities to work with them they were binding us closer to our church and also training future workers in their own organizations, that weak point would not exist.”

“Last winter from January until Easter a preparatory class for boys was led by a young man. Each Sunday afternoon was given to that class. On Easter Sunday when many of that class joined the church their leader surely might have felt that he had accomplished something for his church.”

“A group of eight Camp Fire girls, by means of a Tag Day, realized enough to provide thirty-six Thanksgiving dinners for the poor or needy folks.”

“Older girls’ classes have on several special Sundays taken charge of decorating the church, and flowers for the pulpit are supplied by groups or individuals. I have had the chance to remind folks that we obtain flowers in this way.”

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“Publicity Committee work for a drive meant hundreds of turns on the mimeograph and a tired arm. However, it meant also something done to help my church.”

One church, by means of two helpers, keeps bulletin boards with glass doors in two most public places of the town as a means of displaying all sorts of varied items of pleasing or religious nature. These are frequently changed as new selections are constantly made.

Probably most of the things which it is worth while to ask young people to do are reasonably obvious. The difficulty is to keep the organization productive. Training a few good organizers among the young people themselves is necessary.

I have known many fantastic and amusing things to be done for the church. One poultry keeper devoted to the ministerial salary the proceeds of all the eggs laid on Sunday. Someone put a bean in the Sunday School collection. The superintendent said nothing but planted the bean, brought to the Sunday School all the seed produced by its descendants of the second year, distributed the beans and their history among the pupils, who after a like period were to devote the crops to the cause. That, like greatness, was of slow growth, but I know a rural church interior which was com-

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pletely repaired by one summer's growth of calves redeemed from the slaughter. One young man asked each of the farmers in the parish to fatten one calf for just three months, after which it was to be devoted, veal, hide and summary, to the adornment of the sanctuary. The farmers felt no burden, the calves enjoyed a summer's vacation from death, and the church was redecorated. In its bovine interior to-day the saints enjoy the results of this bucolic whimsicality. A "potato per pupil" distributed in the Sunday school, carried home and planted produced enough spuds in the fall to pay for new songbooks.



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AUTHOR

Hewitt, A. W.

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Steeple Among the Hills

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED
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10-28-41	W. Thomas	
	J. J. [unclear]	
	Reserve	
4/3/42	Recd	
9/27/45		
11/15		
8/16		

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